Horror in Culture & Entertainment

RUE MORGUE

RESTLESS SPIRITS



RUE MORGUE CINEMA IS RISEN WITH THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF ROSALIND LEIGH

BEHIND THE SCENES OF OUR FIRST HORROR FEATURE

THE HAUNTING

CO-STAR CLAIRE BLOOM HELPS US CELEBRATE 50 YEARS OF THE ICONIC GHOST STORY

THE CONJURING

DIRECTOR JAMES WAN AND STAR PATRICK WILSON ON THEIR LATEST SPOOK STORY

THE DEAD SPEAK IN THE BONE CAVES OF CENTRAL LUZON

NEIL JORDAN'S BYZANTIUM | JACK PIERCE GALLERY | RONALD MALFI'S CRABLE LAKE | BLACK SABBATH ON BLU RAY

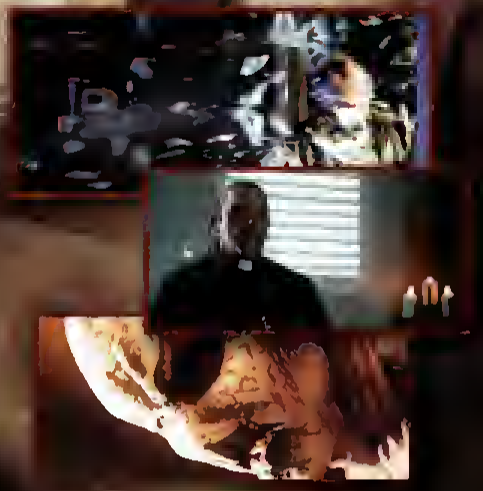
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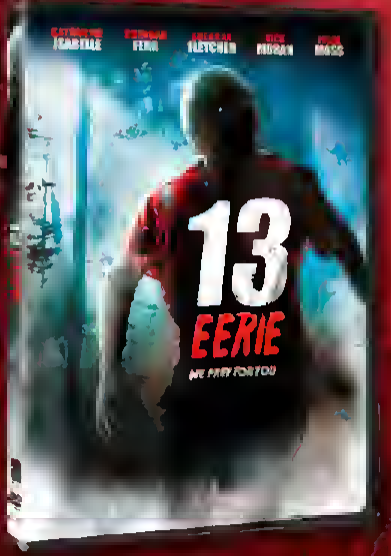
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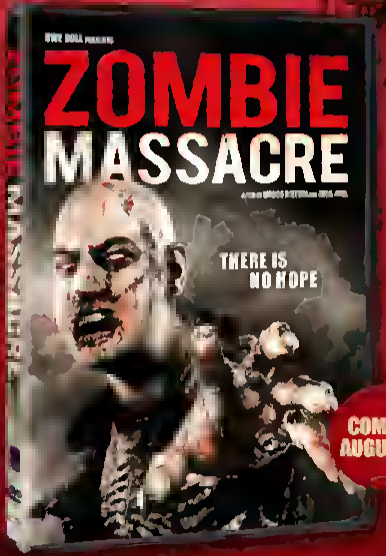
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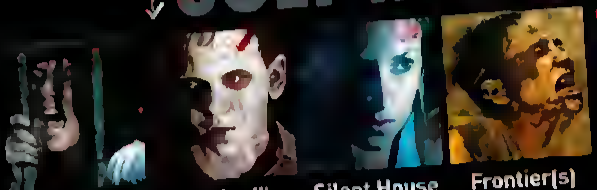
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JULY 2013 #135



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NOTE FROM UNDERGROUND



"Faith is fragile" – I find that tagline for *The Last Will and Testament of Rosalind Leigh* particularly intriguing this issue.

Y'see, this one presented us with a conundrum in terms of how we cover this first feature from *Rue Morgue* president Rodrigo Gudiño. You, the reader, puts faith in us to deliver a cover story that's the best choice for the *RM* audience first and foremost, not something dictated by advertisers, or simply self-promotion. The last thing we want to do is abuse that trust.

That said, Rue Morgue Cinema's first feature is huge for our little company – a thoughtful, original indie film that represents the spirit of the magazine, has an unusual cast and crew, and presents us with an opportunity to explore the genre in a way that we haven't done before. More importantly, though, at conventions and online you guys have asked us for more on the film. The interest and support have been overwhelming and very much appreciated.

Our solution was to break our usual Q&A interview style to have Rodrigo simply tell the story of how and why he made *Rosalind Leigh*, to flesh it out with some sidebars penned by a writer who doesn't know him at all, and then put it within the context of other ghost stories – the 50-year-old *The Haunting*, which was an influence; *The Conjuring*, a brand-new ghost story; and a travel piece on a place where the locals believe in communicating with the dead – in order to draw some intriguing parallels. The result, we hope, casts light on Rue Morgue Cinema and its founder, the world of indie horror filmmaking, the ghost movie subgenre in general and perhaps the ways in which we all think about an afterlife. We hope we haven't shaken your faith in us, but strengthened your belief in finding new avenues for the ongoing exploration of the genre.

That tagline also got me thinking about how, in real life, faith is actually very strong in people, and that's something that horror movies are adept at exploiting. Two of the best examples of this are in the original *The Haunting* and *The Innocents* – my favourite classic ghost films – which skillfully manipulate our innate human ability for pattern recognition. Michael Shermer, Editor-in-Chief of *Skeptic* magazine and the founder of The Skeptics Society has done a couple of TED Talks (TED Talks are auditorium speeches that take place around the world about Technology, Entertainment and Design – free to watch at ted.com) called Why People Believe Weird Things and The Pattern Behind Self-Deception, which examine how pattern recognition – a.k.a. pareidolia – works. As he says, "We're programmed to see faces by evolution, faces are important for us socially." (Rorschach inkblot tests also exploit this trait.)

Basically, our ancestors who were better at finding patterns, such as immediately recognizing the faces of friends or foes, were evolutionarily more successful and passed along their genes, so we're hardwired to seek and interpret faces. We want to see faces and we want them to have meaning. We have strong faith in this – enough that you could say we *need* to believe.

Back to *The Haunting*: one of the scariest scenes in the film has protagonist Nell staring at the bedroom wall at night before realizing that some*thing* has been gripping her hand. Leading up to this moment, director Robert Wise brilliantly lets us do the work by training his camera on the wall moulding, where some slight manipulations to the pattern suggest a sinister face taking form (see for yourself above). Enhancing things with eerie lighting and soundtrack, he cuts back and forth between Nell's horrified face and the wall, which seems to be increasingly more malevolent. Thank pareidolia for what appears to be some absolutely hideous manifestation.

Things work differently – but no less effectively – in *The Innocents*. The scene that freaks me way, way out has Deborah Kerr's character spotting a woman in black standing in the reeds of a pond. This time, we're not given a pattern to find a face in, but a face that we can't quite make out. We're denied that facial recognition required to evaluate the figure standing before us. Again, brilliant filmmaking on the part of director Jack Clayton, he simply placed the camera in a sweet spot where our mind struggles to properly complete this pattern recognition but cannot, which leads to feelings of the uncanny.

There are other facial recognition tricks too, of course, such as obscuring the face with long hair (J-horror), giving the house itself a face (*The Amityville Horror*), or making an inanimate face – such as one on a statue – move or change its look (*Exorcist III*). That last one also happens in *The Last Will and Testament of Rosalind Leigh*, but I won't elaborate to avoid spoilers.

Anyone can film a scary-looking face, but it's something else entirely to mess with an audience on a cognitive level. For that, it takes a true master of the genre.

Dave Alex

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Horror in Culture & Entertainment

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RUE MORGUE #135 is dedicated to Iain Banks. R.I.P.

COVER THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF ROSALIND LEIGH
Design by Justin Erickson

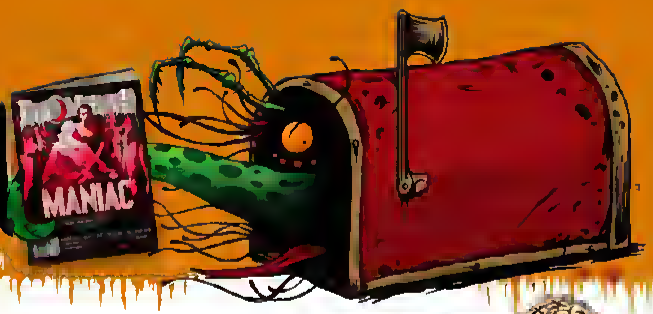
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POST MORTEM

COMMENTS • QUESTIONS • CRITICISM



THANK YOU, thank you, thank you for the wonderful article and interview for *American Mary*. I've been watching the magazine like a hawk since last fall hoping for coverage on it, mostly because *Rue Morgue* always does such a good job, and I find your reviews well thought out and assessments honest. The coverage of the new version of *Maniac* in the same issue – well, I don't know if could have been any happier unless the magazine had come with a bag of cookies shaped like Pinhead's face.

KATHERINE K. OOYLE – HOUSTON, TEXAS

BRITISH ISSUE *[RM#133]* **REALLY.** Sounds to me like you're dogging on Hammer. No stories on Amicus... pitiful. I was really looking forward to this issue, since Hammer horror was the beginning of my horror education. Extremely disappointed.

TRACEY TICHY, VIA FACEBOOK

[The issue was not intended as a comprehensive history of British horror but rather a unifying theme. For a celebration of Hammer, our 100th issue featured a cover story on the company and Christopher Lee. The digital version of it is available as a free download. Hope this helps you get your fix! – Ed.]

I GOT MY BRITISH horror movie issue today. I'm always happy to see that white mailing envelope but this one is super special. *The Wicker Man* is the best movie ever. Thanks for being one of the best things in my mailbox!

SARAH MCWILLIAMS, VIA FACEBOOK

I'VE SUBSCRIBED to your magazine for almost eight years and I intend to remain with you for several more. Nevertheless, the movie critics seem increasingly negative. Your magazine should encourage your readers to discover new movies and not the opposite. I have a suggestion, why not do as the Audio Drome section does and put the focus on the products that stand out this month? On the good side, let me say that your magazine is the best, even with some flaws.

JIMMY FRANCOEUR – ADDRESS WITHHELD

YOU DON'T KNOW how thrilled I was to see your March *[RM#131]* cover story on Arthur Machen's 150th birthday. The comments from John Carpenter were especially a treat. I was disappointed, however, that Lovecraft expert S.T. Joshi is still promoting his belief that Machen was anti-nature and had a "loathing of illicit sex." This idea turns up in Joshi's book *The Weird Tale* (stating that Machen had a "horror of sex," among other examples), as well as his introductions to the Machen collections published by Chaosium. In none of these works does Joshi provide any supporting evidence, apart from the ambiguous "hints" in some of Machen's weird tales, particularly *The Great God Pan*. If Machen was anti-nature, anti-sex, or prudish beyond the norm of his time, I would like to see some external evidence about his personal beliefs, apart from interpretations of his fiction, which, as "weird tales," are open to a great deal of interpretation, and were primarily intended to create atmosphere and stir reaction. So far, I haven't found any such evidence either in Machen's autobiographical writing or in Joshi's criticism. Joshi himself admits that the suggestions of sexual immorality in Machen's stories were considered obscene in his day, which itself provides evidence that writing about sexuality at all was problematic. In any case, the mere fact that a story contains vaguely transgressive sexuality, even depicted as "sinful" or "evil," is no proof that the writer believes sex is intrinsically evil. Treating sexuality as sinful has been a time-honoured tactic enabling artists to deal with transgressive material, and was commonly seen in the works of Machen's contemporaries.

KAREN JOAN KOHOUTEK – FARGO, NORTH DAKOTA

I'M A BIT LATE since I got *RM#133* and *#134* together, but GODDAMN, how many times can I say, "This is the greatest issue yet!" I've converted (without drugs or threats – okay, maybe a little of each) a few friends into becoming readers, each of whom said, "This is like *Famous Monsters* for adults!" I'm hoping you'll do a combined Ray issue, as in Harryhausen and Bradbury. I've just ordered *200 Alternative Horror Films* and can hardly wait to read it. (A Kindle edition would be nice, too.) I can't say anything else because the ears of all your writers must be burning. Keep up the great work, and I'll keep reading. I can't help it!

ROB MORGANBESSER – STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK

[RM#90 has a cover story featuring Ray Harryhausen, and Ray Bradbury was featured on the covers of RM#32 *and* RM#125. *Enjoy! – Ed.]*

THANKS FOR COMING to and helping sponsor Texas Frightmare Weekend! I was happy to get one of the limited edition T-shirts!

JANUARY JACE, VIA FACEBOOK

JUST COUNTED HOW MANY movies I've seen out of @RueMorgue excellent 200 Alt Horror films book = 50. I have a lot of watching to do.

@SIDAMONGTHEPURE, VIA TWITTER

CORRECTIONS:

The title of the new Clive Barker, Mark Miller and Haemi Jang comic series featured in RM#133 *was changed to* Next Testament after the issue went to print.

In RM#134 *we mispelled Katharine Isabelle's name in the* American Mary *feature. We apologize for the error.*

EXPIRING MINDS...

EVERY WEEK ON RUE MORGUE'S FACEBOOK PAGE



What scene in a ghost movie scared the bejeezus out of you more than any other?

The Haunting – Eleanor lying in bed holding "Theo's hand" while seeing the face in the moulding on the wall and listening to the distant ghostly mumbling, screaming and laughter. So much of the movie is incredibly eerie!

JAMIE PELLERIN

Old lady in window in *Insidious*.

JOHN GIBSON

In *Burnt Offerings*, every time Oliver Reed's character would see or think of the chauffeur from his childhood.

DOUG MILLS

The damn clown in *Poltergeist*.

PEACH YOURGODDESS COOPER

Ju-On – when that kid opened his mouth and a cat screech came out. I nearly shit myself.

JEFF MELO

The Changeling, when the wet ball bounces down the stairs.

KATHERINE K. DOYLE

Nothing beats *The Innocents*. Nothing.

ROBERT ROTHSCHILD

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Dreadlines

NEWS HIGHLIGHTS HORROR HAPPENINGS

JACK PIERCE MEMORIAL GALLERY UNVEILED IN LOS ANGELES

The man behind many of the greatest movie monster makeups has been honoured with a new gallery that bears his name The Jack Pierce Memorial Gallery for Makeup and Character Arts – named after the makeup wizard who designed the look of such celebrated Universal monsters as Boris Karloff's Frankenstein's monster and Imhotep the Mummy, Lon Chaney Jr.'s Wolf Man and Elsa Lanchester's Bride – was dedicated in a ceremony that took place on May 30 in Los Angeles

Housed inside the LA-based Cinema Makeup School (CMS), the gallery showcases both a permanent and rotating exhibition of pieces from various special effects houses, veteran makeup experts and talented, rising artists Visitors to the exhibit will find busts of Pierce, Karloff as the Mummy, and various life-size props of assorted creatures, including a werewolf, mermaids and a Morlock from 1960's *The Time Machine*

"We host sculptures, paintings, photographs, film artifacts and, of course, many prosthetic makeup pieces," says the school's creative coordinator, Nate Cohn. "The common thread is that everything is related to cinematic makeup and practical effects "

The event was marked by a presentation on the life and career of Pierce by author and classic horror film historian Scott Essman, which included a photo slideshow showing the makeup guru at work during his time as Universal's makeup department head, which spanned from 1928 to 1947 Essman's interest in Pierce and his work has also led him to write about the artist for such publications as *Make-Up Artist Magazine*, as well as to helm a play about him, *Jack Pierce: The Man Behind the Monsters* As influential and popular as Pierce's creations were, however, Essman says the makeup wizard himself (who passed away in July 1968) did not receive much respect later in life

"Pierce wasn't the first monster makeup artist, but he was certainly the most important Nearly all of the monsters and special effects makeup since Pierce's time owes a homage to his work [But] he was almost completely forgotten in the years following his heyday After his run at Universal ended, he was somewhat disregarded, so his career ended in B-pictures and television, with his last job being the *Mr Ed* TV series Magazines such as *Famous Monsters of Filmland* kept Pierce's work alive for a new generation of monster kids, but there hadn't been a book or DVD documentary dedicated to Pierce when I began researching his career and life "

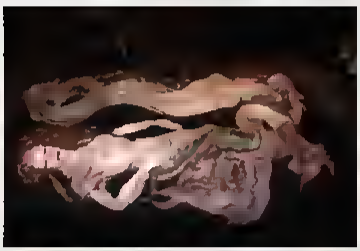


The school, which offers instruction in everything from beauty makeup to prosthetics, and whose faculty members include such artists as Craig Reardon (*Poltergeist*, *The Gate*), Mike Spatola (*Tremors*, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*) and Joel Harlow (*Lord of Illusions*, the *Pirates of the Caribbean* films), recently celebrated its 20th anniversary. Cohn says the school created the gallery as a means to both inspire students and hooour an art form that can sometimes be overlooked in a production

"We wanted to create a place where those "below-the-line" artists' talents get to take centre stage, because the work is objectively pretty incredible Jack Pierce is a perfect namesake for exactly that reason; in films like *Frankenstein* and *The Wolf Man*, [he] created truly iconic monsters – images that have lasting cultural impact that's right up there with anything Walt Disney made – yet few people know of him outside of the makeup and monster fan communities We felt like this was one positive step CMS could take toward fixing that " The Cinema Makeup School is located at 3780 Wilshire Blvd, the exhibit is on the second floor The gallery is open to the public during school hours from 8 30 a m to 5 00 p m , Monday to Friday

For more info on the school's programs visit cinemamakeupschool com

JAMES BURRELL



Jack Pierce (top) doing the makeup on ***The Wolf Man****, and mermaid sculpts at the gallery*

STREET ARTIST TURNS MENTAL HOSPITAL INTO HORROR ART MUSEUM

The parish of Barrow Gurney in Somerset, England, isn't the kind of place you'd expect to go for your horror art fix. But the town's abandoned psychiatric facility – saved from demolition when it was found to be a favourite roosting place for a dozen bat species – has become the venue for the horror movie tributes of street artist Jamie Paul Scanlon, better known as JPS. Mostly done with spray paint and stencils, his life-sized paintings of such horror icons as Freddy Krueger and Jason Voorhees haunt the decaying hospital, turning the grounds into a gallery of underground art.

The Barrow Hospital (sometimes referred to as simply Barrow Gurney) was built in 1934 to resolve issues of overcrowding in the nearby City of Bristol Mental Hospital. Initially planned as an expansive facility, the building was only half finished when it opened to patients in 1939, due to the outbreak of World War II the same year, the hospital was never completed.

"Since doing my artworks I've been told a lot of stories about the place," says Scanlon. "Some were awful, like a nurse hanging herself, and multiple suicides off a nearby bridge. A lot of experiments were also rumoured to have taken place there.... Barrow was the perfect setting for horror-type work."

A report by the BBC the year before the hospital's closure in 2006 called it the dirtiest in the country – certainly an awful distinction for a health facility, but one that helped prime the canvas for Scanlon's creepy art, which also includes full-colour portraits of Pinhead and Chucky painted directly onto the hospital's doors and walls.

"The place looked creepy as hell and lacked the usual amount of tags most abandoned buildings bear – it was a fresh canvas in my eyes," explains Scanlon, who first visited the structure about seven years after it was shut down. Since Barrow Hospital is not open to the public, Scanlon's visits haven't exactly been legal, but so far there have been no repercussions.

"No complaint, no charges," he says. "I try to put things where I think they belong, as neatly as possible, but also quickly."

Despite the prominence of famous fright figures in Scanlon's work, there's more to his Barrow Hospital art than is immediately apparent. He says some of the pieces bear a personal message that few besides him will ever know – for instance, a rendering of *It*'s Pennywise the Clown was meant to call out fellow artist Banksy for a good-natured street art war – but Scanlon admits that other pieces were created "to just plain scare the hell out of people. I consider myself a pretty universal artist. I like making people laugh with my more humorous street art pieces, but I guess there's a consistent dark streak in my work."

The artist, who's been drawing since he was four years old, dropped out of college to indulge in drugs and alcohol, and wound up homeless. He "cleaned up his act" four years ago when he started creating street art. A long-time slasher fan, he feels a special connection to one particular boogeyman.

"My favourite horror icon is Jason Voorhees," Scanlon admits. "I feel I can kinda relate to him, except I drowned in booze as opposed to Crystal Lake."

Of course, to be an artist of any sort is to court criticism, and Scanlon's work at Barrow Hospital has come under fire, with some objecting to what they see as its glib nature.

"One person said I threw away a golden opportunity to highlight mental health. If they were buying the paint, I [might have] listened."

Scanlon is constantly embarking on new projects, you can find out about them on his Facebook page (search "JPS").

PATRICK DOLAN





Pennywise and Jason Voorhees are painted onto the exterior of the facility's buildings



DARK HORSE TO PUBLISH EXPLOITATION FILM-THEMED COMIC BOOK SERIES



Dark Horse is set to blur the lines between the splash panel and the exploitation flick with an upcoming mini-series called *Grindhouse Doors Open at Midnight*. The eight-issue run, which will consist of four 48-page stories, is being scripted by Eisner-nominated writer Alex de Campi (*Smoke*, *Kat & Mouse*), who promises, "[It will have] kick-ass female heroines, shredded clothing, erotic pie fights, [and] a heavy dose of same-sex hookups, all of it liberally splattered with blood, guts and a few more esoteric bodily fluids."



Cover artists will include Francesco Francavilla, Dan Panosian and hot-rod artist Coop; interior art duties fall to Chris Peterson, Simon Fraser, Gary Erskine and Federica Manfredi.

"The way I am writing these, there is a heavy dose of John Carpenter, so lots of great one-liners and real fist-in-the-air kind of finishes to each story," says de Campi. "They'll gross you out, give you the horn (sometimes on the same page), make you laugh and scream, and then make you clap with glee at the end."

The series – out October 2 – will kick off with "Bee Vixens From Mars!," which de Campi calls "the alien/sex/perversion one" with a "tinge of Mexploitation." The gory tale finds a one-eyed Latina deputy fending off a slutty extraterrestrial plot to lay eggs in human males. Readers can also look forward to a women-in-prison yarn, a dark rape-revenge tale, and the gloriously titled "Flesh Feast of the Devil Doll," which pits a girl gang against satanic forces. De Campi notes that each story will feature an unconventional twist. For instance, the prison segment takes place in space, while the rape story is set in medieval times (a nod to Ingmar Bergman's *The Virgin Spring*).

If the series sells well, de Campi would love to continue it. She has ideas for at least four other stories: a blaxploitation riff, a space story in the vein of *Barbarella*, a mondo tale ("like *Cannibal Holocaust*, but probably way more psychedelic"), and a straightforward horror number about a serial killer, or possibly ghosts.

Of course, it's not grindhouse if the floor's not sticky, so readers can expect copious amounts of sex and gore.

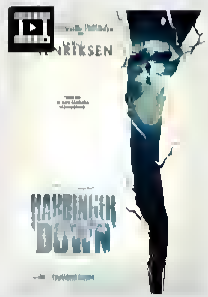
"We actually had a lot of pushback from the publisher," explains de Campi, "because the first issue was *too* gory and *too* raunchy – like there is such a thing, right?"

APRIL SNELLINGS

ENTRAILS

Sightseers director Ben Wheatley will release his next feature, *A Field in England*, via multiple formats simultaneously in the UK. In what has been called an unprecedented rollout for a British production, the film will be released in theatres, on DVD, on freeview TV and on VOD, on July 5. *Field*, which stars Reece Shearsmith (*The League of Gentlemen*), Michael Smiley (Wheatley's *Kill List*) and Julian Barratt (*The Mighty Boosh*), is set during the English Civil War. Wheatley has described it as a psychedelic, historical drama that is heavily influenced by folk horror. Drafthouse Films has acquired the North American distribution rights, but no release date has been announced.

Aliens: Colonial Marines is now the subject of a class-action lawsuit. Gearbox and Sega are both accused of false advertising by misrepresenting the game to consumers. The suit was filed by law firm Edelson LLC on behalf of plaintiff Damion Perrine and claims the game's early footage, billed as "actual gameplay" and used for marketing and trade show demonstrations, was different from what appeared in the final game. A statement from Sega to video game news website Polygon read, "SEGA cannot comment on specifics of ongoing litigation but we are confident that the lawsuit is without merit and we will defend it vigorously."



Award-winning visual effects artists Alec Gillis and Tom Woodruff, Jr., co-founders of Studio ADI, have launched a Kickstarter campaign to finance their new creature feature *Harbinger Down*. The film will feature only practical animatronics and makeup effects in an attempt to capture the spirit of sci-fi/horror classics such as *The Thing*. Of the project, Gillis said, "Fans of the art of animatronics and makeup FX know this technique is currently overlooked by the big studios; I'm hoping the fans will help us remedy that by supporting this labour of love." The pair's credits include *The Monster Squad*, *Tremors* and *Starship Troopers*.

Michael Biehn and Jennifer Blanc-Biehn's Blanc Biehn Productions announced it has entered into an agreement with Hackybox Pictures for the funding of their latest production, *Hidden in the Woods*, an American remake of the controversial Chilean film of the same title. The movie will star Biehn and William Forsythe and tells the tale of two sisters raised in a remote area by an abusive father. The deal was finalized at this year's Cannes Film Festival and the movie is set to start filming in July.

Legendary Filipino writer, director and producer Eddie Romero died May 28 of prostate cancer at the age of 88. Romero was named National Artist of the Philippines in 2003 and achieved cult status as a key figure in a host of Philippines-based horror and exploitation films. Romero was best known for directing *Beast of Blood*, *Beast of the Yellow Night* and *Twilight People*, a film Quentin Tarantino has cited as inspiration for his "grindhouse" homages.

Alamo Drafthouse has announced a new pair of limited edition signature wines inspired by Jonathan Demme's 1991 adaptation of *The Silence of the Lambs*. "The Cannibal Chianti" will pay boozy homage to Hannibal Lecter, while "Suit Yourself Pinot Grigio" raises a glass to the elusive Buffalo Bill. Both wines are currently available at all Alamo Drafthouse locations and online at silenceofthelambswines.com.

CHARLOTTE STEAR

MONSTRO BIZARRO

Bobcat Goldthwait's new Bigfoot movie, *Willow Creek*, recently premiered at the Boston Independent Film Festival. This is the fourth directorial effort for the comedian/actor turned director. Inspired by Bigfoot tales near the real town of Willow Creek, California, the plot follows Jim and his girlfriend Kelly as they "retrace the steps of Bigfoot researchers Patterson and Gimlin, who in 1967 recorded the most famous film of the legendary monster." *Willow Creek* delivers a mix of satire and suspense as Jim and Kelly first interview local Bigfoot witnesses, then head off into the woods themselves. The result is a movie that, according to the Independent Film Festival website, "pumps new life into the found-footage horror genre." A wide release date for *Willow Creek* has not been announced, but in the meantime, watch for screenings in select cities.

LYLE BLACKBURN

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CORONER'S REPORT

WEIRD STATS & MORBID FACTS

CASE NO 135

The Bride (of *The Bride of Frankenstein*) is the only one of Universal Studios' Classic Monsters never to have killed anyone

In 1952, New York City took the Cold War precaution of issuing dog tags to all students in kindergarten through fourth grade, so their bodies would be easy to identify in the event of an attack

During the filming of *Candyman* (1992), Virginia Madsen was hypnotized so that her pupils would remain dilated. It was the look the director wanted her character to have when confronted by the titular villain.

A Florida man was charged with first-degree murder earlier this year after he accidentally pocket-dialled 911 and was heard discussing his part in the crime

ParaNorman is set in the town of Blithe Hollow, which is a reference to two classic ghost stories. Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit* (1945) and Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (1949).

Colorado police nabbed a fugitive known as the "funeral bandit" this past March, he's accused of robbing people's homes while they were attending funerals

The student who is knocked unconscious by the fire hose in the school gym during the prom scene in 1976's *Carrie* was actually knocked out by the pressure during the scene's filming

In the early 20th century, drinking radioactive water was touted to have therapeutic effects. the practice wasn't discontinued until the 1930s when a death was linked to imbibing the liquid

This May, the frontman of metal band As I Lay Dying was charged with "solicitation of another to commit murder" for a hit he was allegedly trying to put out on his estranged wife

Fred Baur, the creator of Pringles, had his cremains placed in a Pringles can after he died

Scottish guitarist Les Harvey, who toured his homeland with a variety of bands throughout the 1960s and early '70s, survived a fatal car wreck only to be electrocuted by an ungrounded mic live on stage in 1972

Vlad the Impaler not only mounted his victims on poles, but is also said to have spread their blood on his bread and consumed it

Roger Corman's 1995 TV remake of *Piranha* features both a preteen Mila Kunis (*Black Swan*) and a teenage Soleil Moon Frye (a.k.a. Punky Brewster)

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BODY HORROR

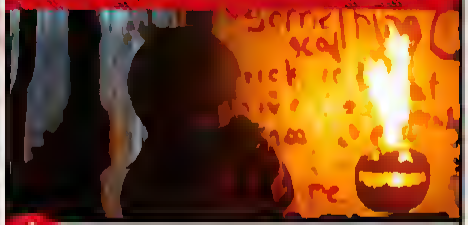
PENNYWISE
ARTIST: Andy Engel (andys-tattoo.com)

"Pennywise, the clown from Stephen King's *It*, is such a cool portrait! I just like the style and the design. Especially fascinating for me is the split personality. On one hand, a clown is someone who brings fun into your life and makes you laugh. And on the other hand, there's Pennywise, whom I would prefer not to meet. I tattooed this portrait at the Stockholm Tattoo Convention two years ago. Thanks to my collectors for great requests!"

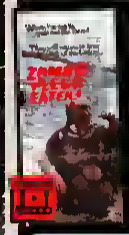
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THE RUE MORGUE SICK TOP SIX

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 PERSISTENT PUMPKIN PATCH KID
2. **DARK NIGHT OF THE SCARECROW**
 BUBBA'S BACK IN BURLAP
3. **THE STRANGERS**
 HOMICIDAL HOME INVADER
4. **FRIDAY THE 13TH, PART 2**
 HOCKEY SEASON HASN'T STARTED
5. **THE TOWN THAT DREADED SUNDOWN**
 PHANTOM KILLER COSTUME
6. **MALEVOLENCE**
 BAG TO BASICS



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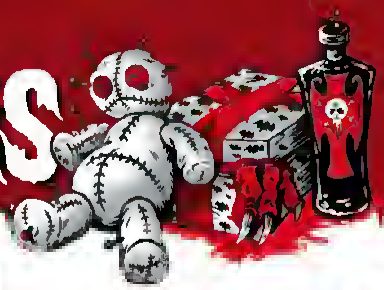
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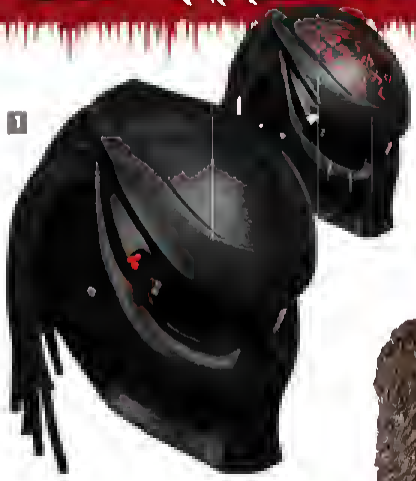
Sleep like the dead – well, the undead, not the hard-to-wake kind – with a rotter-inspired sleep mask that should dissuade anyone from disturbing you before you're ready to shuffle back into the land of the living. Catch some zzzzz's at **archiemcphee.com**.

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1



2



3



4



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CRYPTIC COLLECTIBLES

FREDDY KRUEGER MODEL KIT

(Screamin' Products, 1987)



One of the earliest licensed Freddy Krueger collectibles to hit the market, this 1/4 scale, eighteen-inch-tall vinyl model kit was released by Screamin' Products, a company that would go on to manufacture memorable kits of other horror characters including Jason, Leatherface and Elvira. Sporting a great likeness to actor Robert Englund's cinematic alter ego, the ultra-detailed model was moulded in a classic Freddy pose: gloved hand raised above his head, ready to strike. Adding an extra touch of authenticity were miniature chrome glove blades and a removable fedora that allowed builders to show off Freddy's exposed brain. Unbuilt kits can usually be found on eBay for between $75 to $100.

JAMES BURRELL

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- Mary Shelley, Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus.



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RUE MORGUE FOUNDER RODRIGO GUDIÑO TAKES US ON A PERSONAL JOURNEY: HOW HE CREATED RUE MORGUE CINEMA'S FLAGSHIP FEATURE FILM THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF ROSALIND LEIGH

WHAT'S INSIDE A GHOST?

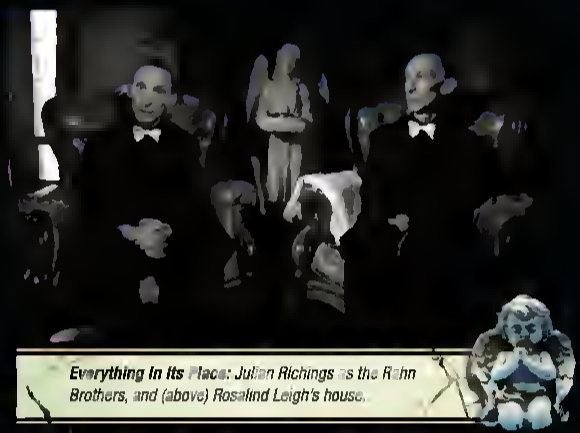
BY RODRIGO GUDIÑO



I LOVE A GREAT GHOST STORY, which is probably why I spent a big chunk of my formative years chasing down the cinematic equivalent – haunted house movies – on home video. *The Amityville Horror*, *The Changeling*, *Poltergeist* and *The Shining* were rotating features in the midnight movie marathon that my friends and I would indulge in on most weekends during those impressionable years. By the time I kicked off *Rue Morgue*, well into my twenties, I'd had the opportunity to revisit a lot of those old haunts and discover new ones – long-haired Japanese ghosts, housebound Spanish spookshows and the "evidence" of paranormal activity in suburban America.







Everything In its Place: Julian Richings as the Rahn Brothers, and (above) Rosalind Leigh's house.

So when it came time to write my first feature film, you could say I was intimately aware of the subgenre. I had come to realize that all haunted house movies seem to tell the story of what happens when a person or persons enter a haunted environment – they interact with things from beyond. It seems to me that, fundamentally, all haunted house movies are about this interaction.

This got me thinking in a slightly different direction: what happens inside a haunted house if there is no one there? Does the ghost still exist? Can an abandoned house still be haunted? This line of thinking made me realize that it is far less interesting to consider what's inside a haunted house, and far more intriguing to consider what's inside – a ghost.

Summer 2011: I receive a phone call from my producer, *Rue Morgue* financial controller Marco Pecota, asking me if I can have a script ready for Telefilm, Canada's national film funding body. Budget is low, concept is everything. I pitch him the idea of a guy who spends a night in a haunted house. The catch? A significant part of the story has nobody in it.

"Wait a second, what do you mean there's nobody in it?"

One of the things that initially attracted me to making the transition from editor of a horror magazine to filmmaker was the prospect of exploring the medium in unusual ways, something I had been doing with my short films for some years. I envision a story that is diametrically opposed to the fast cut, action-heavy sequences currently in vogue. Short and quick is what the YouTube age calls for, whereas I decide to draw inspiration from the radio dramas popular in the 1930s, before television. In that lost art, audiences would actively flesh out a scene strictly through audio cues that lead them to imagine a good deal of what is being presented to them.

Writing around a single character who happens to be absent from the screen for much of the film was also a pretty decent way of exploring the subject of loneliness and the psychological weight that accompanies it, especially when it is of a sort that torments human beings as they near the end of their lives. To top it off, I added a shade of religious horror, but not in a demonic sense. In my movie, the religious horror is religion itself.

Armed with these ideas, I locked myself in an office and spent the next three weeks writing, trying to stay true to the concept and meet the deadline. I slowly came to realize that a movie like this has never quite been done before, which on the one hand seems challenging and potentially groundbreaking, on the other a costly risk and a potential failure.

Here's what I came up with (no spoilers): a rather average-looking but emotionally frayed antiques dealer named Leon inherits a gloomy house from his recently deceased mother Rosalind, and reluctantly goes to assess the space and its contents. Upon arrival, he learns that his estranged mom had been anonymously buying the antiques he has sold throughout his career, something that unsettles him since he hasn't seen her in years. His mixed feelings are further compounded by the striking presence of angel statues peering from every corner of the house, a sign that Rosalind's bizarre religious views only became more fanatical towards the end.

More than a bit troubled, Leon bunks down for the night, but as the evening wears on he starts to succumb to a progressive sense of unease. There are some curious goings on, including a strange neighbour who is heard but never seen, those ubiquitous statues, some of which he believes may have begun to move, and something lurking in the garden. Soon Leon comes to suspect that his mother's spirit may be wandering the corridors of the old house, trying to communicate with him.

As I said before, I love ghost stories, but writing this script made me realize how my love for them is rooted in literary experience. With the exception of maybe Robert Wise's *The Haunting* (which wears its literary influences on its sleeve), ghost stories are generally more successful – and age better – in books. I decide then and there to seize this opportunity as a way of experimenting with literary devices in film. I polish off the script in three weeks and give it a long bookish title to ram home its primary influence.

Three days later, I received a phone call. Not one I expected.

A bit of backtracking is in order. When I started writing the script, I knew that I needed to find the main location because of the way I chose to use the camera in a very precise manner and, of course, all this had to be in the script. It wasn't long before we found a house full of antiques that belonged to a lovely woman who lived there with her two children. It was one of those perfect locations that, as a filmmaker, you know is one of the things that is going to make the movie work.

Thankfully, she was open to the idea and we were able to lock the house for filming. As one must often do with low-budget film projects, I proceeded to structure the entire script around that location, preplanning what furniture we would have to swap out, what rooms to use and how to close off other rooms so that the story could work best. Everything seemed set.

Fast forward to that phone call: the person on the other end of the line is the homeowner, who regrets to inform me that I can no longer shoot in her house! My heart sinks. "Why not?" She is vague, apologizes profusely and hangs up. I have just lost the biggest character in my movie and I haven't even begun casting!

Assessing the situation, I figure that, best case scenario, I will have to find a new location and rewrite the entire script. Worst case scenario... well, I don't want to think about that.

While I discuss with Marco what on earth to do, Telefilm calls. They like the script, we've been greenlit.

Being as tactful as I can be under the circumstances, I re-approach the homeowner with a heartfelt letter describing my dilemma: I need her house! She agrees to meet with me and it is then that I realize that she too is an artist, one who lives inside her creation. I understand fully when she tells me that she just doesn't want to be away from it for any period of time. After some discussion she finally agrees to let me shoot in her house providing that she and her two kids can stay there for the duration of the filming. It's not an ideal situation, given the crew of 40 people we have to cram into the building, but if that's the price we need to pay, so be it.

We commence principle photography in October 2011, and although we did have mainly one actor in the film, I had five or six on set, including the inimitable Julian Richings (*Death from Supernatural*), as cult members the twin Rahn brothers, and Stephen Eric McIntyre (*High Life*), as a preacher. And even though we mainly used one location, in reality we had over 30 places to film around the city for all the shots that happen outside of the house. So this movie, which was very contained and written to be as effortless as possible, became quite challenging when things came down to it.

At the centre of it all was the house: beautiful, darkly elegant and somewhat claustrophobic. Standing alone in this fantastic setting is my lead actor, Aaron Poole [see right], who understood that beneath the surface there is a wealth of complexity to Leon. But he has a few other hurdles: acting alongside a roving camera that is only partially focused on his character, among them.

After our first day of shooting I hear a rumour going round that, appar-



ROSALIND LEIGH STAR AARON POOLE TALKS ABOUT THE DIFFICULTIES OF STARRING IN A ONE-MAN GHOST STORY

AT ONE WITH SPIRITS

BY ALISON LANG

WHEN AARON POOLE SIGNED on to play the lead in *The Last Will and Testament of Rosalind Leigh*, he faced a unique challenge: his character Leon is the lone human onscreen for the bulk of the film, with only a host of inanimate objects and a CGI monster to keep him company.

An antiques dealer, Leon is charged with sorting through his estranged mother's possessions after her death. Of course, this is no ordinary senior's home laden with the fuzzy tchotchkes of the aged – Rosalind Leigh's house is a shrine, filled with religious iconography and cultish imagery. The marble angels, wooden idols and other creepy artifacts in the maternal home occupy as much, if not more screen time than Poole himself, with director Rodrigo Gudiño's camera lingering over the ominous figures with a clinical precision. Add to this a weirdly simian, wolflike creature that occasionally appears to Leon without warning, and you have a filming environment that calls for intense focus and the ability to step into an anxious and slightly manic headspace. The Toronto-based Poole says he relished the chance to inhabit the role.

"This was completely new for me," he notes. "Up until this point I'd really tried to focus on authentic interaction with other humans. The level of interaction required way more energy than a slice-of-life drama. I had to react authentically to a completely fabricated enemy and sustain that elaborate fantasy at the same time."

Poole's resume includes the upcoming thriller *The Conspiracy* and the acclaimed 2010 gothic indie *Small Town Murder Songs*. His involvement with *Leigh* began when Gudiño and producer Marco Pecota asked him to read a draft of the script. Impressed by the film's tone and pacing, Poole phoned back the next day with an enthusiastic endorsement; he was offered the role, his first in the horror genre, on the spot. ("They went balls-out indie with their casting, and I'm thankful for that," he says.)

Prior to shooting, Poole worked with Gudiño to form a detailed back story for Leon. The script's minimal dialogue means the viewer is often looking to the character's expressions to convey the resonance of his interactions and discoveries, and these moments are key in piecing together *Leigh*'s overall narrative.

"Though the silence in the story and in the house is enigmatic, Leon had to know what every object meant to him," says Poole. "When he bought it, when he sold it, and how his mom related to the various ornaments, when the last time was that he had held said objects... It goes on and on."

Then there's the issue of Leon's crisis of faith – or to be precise, absence of faith – in the wake of a strict and painful childhood linked to his mother's own religious fanaticism. Poole, who was raised Roman Catholic, says he felt the character needed to resist the lure of religion in order to heal.

"Leon's lack of faith is a direct response to the emotional abuse done to him in the past. But, personally, I've learned that the best approach to a solution always circles back around to the same problem. He had to face his past and literally and figuratively exorcise the ghosts."

After spending an entire film in a dark, creaky house surrounded by the most frightful effigies this side of *The Exorcist*, one might think that Poole would be relieved to take a breather from horror. But, if anything, the experience seems to have heightened his enthusiasm.

"I love the possibilities in the horror genre," Poole asserts. "It deals with what makes us afraid, but can, in its inception and execution, be utterly fucking fearless."

ently, some scaffolding collapsed and people were injured on set. It's news to me. It turns out the accident happened at a zombie movie shooting across the city. I can't begin to think of what that would mean if it happened on our set.

All things told, our shoot is quite uneventful. Day by day, night by night, we get through our set ups, at one point cloaking the entire house in fabric so as to turn its insides to the blackest levels of midnight. Time passes slowly and yet it all goes too fast and, one crisp day in the first week of November, we finally wrap.

I imagine most people think that once the shooting is done, the film is just about completed. And even though that certainly feels true, anybody who has ever made a film knows that post production is where you really start making the movie, or at least, turning all that footage into a watchable film.

I shut myself up in a room, much as I did while writing the script, only this time with editor, Duncan Christie. Our task is to cobble the scenes together and finesse and polish them into a presentable cut.

Slowly, something resembling the script begins to emerge. But we are working on a cut that is devoid of a lot of things, special effects and music among them. As I said, there is more than one actor in the movie and one of them is an ominous creature which, like a buried memory, is nudged awake by the stirrings of a newcomer in the house.

I am a big fan of old school in-camera effects, so I originally wanted to work with a contortionist to bring this creature to life. But around the time we were in pre-production, I was sent a "fan film" from an effects guy named Anthony Scott Burns (see p 22), called *Tron: Destiny* (find it on YouTube). Watching what he was able to do with $5000 in a couple of weeks blew my mind and, if it weren't for him, I would never have considered rendering our weird creature as a computer-generated image.

Much like the house, which I set up as a psychological landscape that essentially personified the relationship between Leon and his mother, our creature also had a surreal quality and had to be as much a physical menace as a personification of ideas in the story. For this Anthony brought a few other talented animators and artists on board, among them Marcus Alqueres (fresh off of Steven Spielberg's *The Adventures of Tintin*). Together, the team realized the look, movement and skin of the creature, down to every hair and fibre, even though most of it would be shrouded in shadow.

The music was tougher still. Throughout the course of the writing and filming of *Rosalind Leigh*, I could never get my head around how it should sound. I did what most filmmakers would do; I listened to a lot of music







and asked musician friends and composers to send me demos. It was aggravating, as nothing seemed to gel, only a vague sense that the music had to evoke the feel of the antiques that littered the house. I finally found the sound one night while listening to Peter Murphy's *Dust*, which has an exotic, contemporary mood underscored by a brooding melancholy that fit perfectly with the feel I was looking for.

Looking over the liner notes, I noticed that Murphy collaborated with a Turkish musician named Mercan Dede. Although I had never heard of him, Dede is a superstar on the international world music scene, not to mention a DJ in his own right who has also contributed to soundtracks for Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* and Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven*, among others.

I decided to reach out and, as luck would have it, he liked the assembly cut enough to agree to write an original score. What he produced was a quiet soundtrack centred on wind instruments, such as the didgeridoo and the nay (an Iranian flute), that seemed to literally breathe the film to life.

And yet even with these hurdles overcome, one major component was still missing: Rosalind Leigh herself. The title character is one of a few people whose presence is heard more than seen in the movie, and for this reason I knew that whoever my actor was going to be, she had to be able to communicate all the loss, regret and loneliness that I had written into the character – with just her voice.

When I first started thinking of who to cast in the role, I never thought I would end up collaborating with Vanessa Redgrave, who has worked with the likes of Ken Russell on *The Devils* and was being honoured by the Academy Awards before I was even born. But while looking for whom I was to cast I came across an interview she did for British television, and was amazed at all of the life experience that crackled in her voice. No question, I needed her in my movie. Thanks to persistence and our casting director, we were able to get her the script and, thankfully again, she liked what she read.

I flew to New York City to meet Redgrave at Sound One Studios located in the legendary Brill Building (which has been described as "the most important generator of popular songs in the Western world" due to its long history of recording) for our *Rosalind Leigh* sessions. I was supposed to have dinner with her the night previous but, due to a miscommunication, never did and so my in-studio encounter was the first time we formally met. To make matters worse, she seemed not to be in the best mood that morning. Still, as her mic was being set up, we talked quietly about the script and reviewed some of the footage I had brought for her to see. Then it was time for her to deliver the lines that open up the film; in the moments that followed, she eerily transformed herself into the frail and troubled woman of the script. It was an amazing moment.

She looked at me to see what I thought but I was dumbfounded. I had never had someone deliver their lines so perfectly on the very first take.

"How about we do one for safety?" I ventured.

She looked at me over furrowed brow and intoned: "A little piece of me dies every time a director tells me to do one for safety. If you don't like it, we'll do it again. Otherwise, let's move on."

We moved on. It might have gone on like this, but ten minutes later we were arguing over a line in the script, she wanted it out, I wanted it in. Hell, I wrote it that way. After some back and forth I finally said to her, "Let's do it your way and then we'll do it my way, how's that sound?" For whatever reason, this seemed to work and from that moment on it felt like we really began to collaborate. She must have felt it too, she broke into a smile, started asking me more questions and asked to experiment with the lines. Some things worked and others didn't, but it didn't matter because we were having a lot of fun. It was a profound experience working with her.

Back home, while finishing effects and music, I was also tasked with hiring more actors, among them Charlotte Sullivan, who voiced Leon's ex-wife Anna and doubled as a radio announcer, and Mitch Markowitz, from the cult television show *The Hilarious House of Frightenstein*, whose unique voice lent itself perfectly to a scene in which a voice on a tape hypnotizes Leon.

Sometime after our first in-progress screening, I am told that Telefilm had selected *Rosalind Leigh* to include in their Perspectives Canada showcase at the 65th Annual Cannes Film Festival. I am elated but feel the pressure of a looming deadline.

The film had its unofficial premiere in Cannes 2012 where it screened before an audience largely made up of industry types: distributors, buyers, film festival people, you name it. I am told by fellow filmmakers that these people comprise the worst audiences in the world, since they think nothing of texting during screenings and also have a tendency to walk out, even when they are interested in the film. After some deliberation I decide to make myself scarce and head to the rooftop patio overlooking the French Riviera. I learn afterwards that I had one walkout from a newspaper writer who was scared. I figure it's a good sign.

But Cannes was just our unofficial premiere, because the film was not yet finished, there was still the matter of a nagging minute or



Rosalind's World: *Rodrigo Gudiño in the studio with Vanessa Redgrave, and (below) candles and angels factor heavily in the film.*



footage that I wanted out. Back home, Duncan and I clip the offending material and ready *Rosalind Leigh* for its international film festival tour.

The festival dates continue in the new year, and eventually we learn that the film will be released in Canada by Anchor Bay Entertainment and stateside by Image Entertainment. More significantly, our sales company, Raven Banner, announces that the movie will be among a handful of features – along with ones by Don Coscarelli (*John Dies at the End*), the Soska Twins (*American Mary*) and Ryûhei Kitamura (*No One Lives*) – that Cineplex, the mammoth multiplex chain, will be showcasing in theatres across Canada.

This month, *The Last Will and Testament of Rosalind Leigh* finally gets its release. In reviews, the film has garnered comparisons to Dan Curtis' *Trilogy of Terror*, John Newland's *Don't Be Afraid of the Dark* and Richard Lang's *Don't Go to Sleep* – you get the picture.

At screenings around the world I have often remarked that the film is best watched alone and not with a crowd. The reason is that it is a very introspective movie that will hopefully put you in the same mindset as when you read a book, where your imagination informs a lot of what you experiencing. As I said at the outset, Rue Morgue Cinema's foray into feature films runs contrary to the tendency to show everything in full colour and dazzle the eyeballs. I hope my movie will stimulate imaginations and perhaps tickle the edges of your soul. In the end, *The Last Will and Testament of Rosalind Leigh* may be more like a book and less like a conventional motion picture, and perhaps this is how it is destined to be remembered. Hope you like it.

HOW DO YOU BUILD A TRULY BIZARRE BEAST? *ROSALIND LEIGH* EFFECTS ARTIST ANTHONY SCOTT BURNS EXPLAINS

DIABOLICAL MUTABILITY

BY ALISON LANG

SPOILER ALERT: There's a creature in *The Last Will and Testament of Rosalind Leigh*, and while it only makes a few appearances, it's quite likely that its memory will stalk the corners of your mind long after the film is over. Credit special effects supervisor Anthony Scott Burns who consulted extensively with director Rodrigo Gudiño to sculpt the monster of his dreams – and our nightmares.

"The monster was described to me by Rodrigo quite clearly – he knew exactly what he wanted," says Burns. "He saw it all and we just made it live and breathe."

Burns, had a childhood passion for model-building that led to experiments in filmmaking, and by age eighteen he was directing his own movies. After a stint at MTV Canada designing "mostly robots and little characters," he began working on commercials and providing visual effects for short films, leading to bigger projects. Prior to *Rosalind Leigh*, he worked as a visual effects artist on *The Last Exorcism II* – but he's probably best known for his 2011 fake trailer *Tron: Destiny*, a dizzying four-minute fan love letter to the original 1982 film set in futuristic Toronto. The no-budget short quickly went viral and put Burns on the map as a talent to watch. With *Rosalind Leigh*, he says he relished the challenge of working within a deceptively simple framework.

"Less is more, always," says Burns. "The audience's imagination is much more powerful than my hand on a mouse attached to a computer. This has always been the case in horror, but now, some people – like Rod – are returning to a more old-school method."

Burns' expert tweaks to the primary setting in *Rosalind Leigh* – the creaky, vacant house, crammed with statues and icons – do the job when it comes to keeping viewers rattled. The measured camera work causes your eyes to dart across the screen, wondering, 'Did I see a pair of eyes blink, or did I just imagine it?' Meanwhile, shadows in the corners of the screen seem to move and stretch of their own accord. For Burns, this process involved a lot of delicate and precise work during shooting. Through light reading, measurements and photographs, he ensured that each frame worked when it came to maximizing the visual effects. The creation of the monster (pictured below) was equally stringent with him providing multiple digital sketches to vet with Gudiño. After a few versions, the director made his choice and the sketch was sent to visual effects artist Mike A. Nash to finalize.

"The monster was a challenge because we wanted it to be hyper-realistic," Burns says. "We didn't want people to be able to tell that it was a CG creation. The anatomy always has to make sense – there has to be skin and bones. Even if you've never seen the creature before, it has to be something that your brain says can work."

One of the thing's creepiest attributes is its deliberate, diabolical mutability – at various points in the film, it resembles an emaciated old woman, or a cat, or the product of an unholy union between Gollum and a werewolf. Burns says this was all intentional.

"The film is hallucinatory and so the creature needed to be there supporting this feeling. The animal we built is there to keep you unsettled, and hopefully it does the job."



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CLAIRE BLOOM, CO-STAR OF

THE HAUNTING,

HELPS US CELEBRATE THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF WHAT MAY BE CINEMA'S GREATEST GHOST STORY

RESTLESS SOULS

BY COLIN McCRACKEN • ILLUSTRATION BY JUSTIN ERICKSON

"No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality."

So begins Shirley Jackson's 1959 novel *The Haunting of Hill House*, a modern classic of supernatural fiction that has had an indelible effect on the world of horror. This powerful source material was adapted into one of the finest ghost stories ever committed to film: 1963's *The Haunting* – a work that Martin Scorsese ranked as number one on a 2009 list of his Scariest Horror Films of All Time.

Its director, Robert Wise (1914-2005), was a product of the studio system. He began his career working for RKO Pictures, ascending through the ranks from humble beginnings fetching coffee, to film porter; eventually he became a sound, narrative and film editor before

directing his first feature, the 1944 period drama *Mademoiselle Fifi*. It was during these years that he honed his skills as a filmmaker, putting in time on some legendary projects.

Wise worked on *Citizen Kane* (1941), for RKO, receiving an Oscar nomination for film editing. This boosted his career greatly and, by good fortune, he was about to form a significant partnership. In 1942, Val Lewton was brought on at RKO to produce features that would capitalize on the trend for horror and psychological thrillers. Wise and Lewton worked together on a number of occasions and, in 1944, Wise directed *The Curse of the Cat People*, his second feature and a Lewton production. The following year, he directed Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi in *The Body Snatcher*.

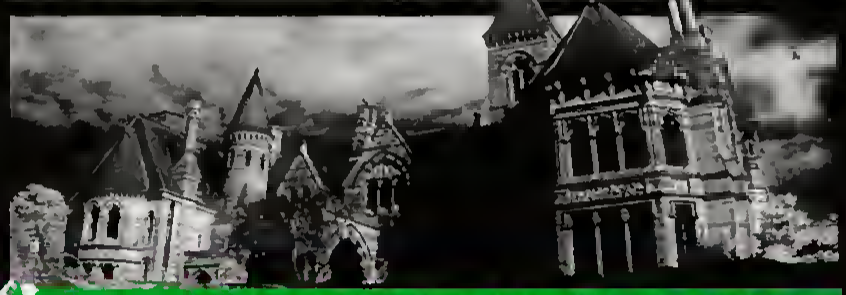
Almost two decades later, Wise's career had solidified; he helmed the seminal 1951 sci-fi tale *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and in 1961 made *West Side Story*. It was during the filming of the latter that a copy of Jackson's novel found its way into his hands.

"That's definitely what drew him in," affirms Claire Bloom, who wasn't familiar with the ghost story before she was cast as the clairvoyant, Theo, in *The Haunting*. "It was all absolutely new to me. Robert was very intrigued by the book, however, and that's what led him to make the film."

In Sergio Leeman's 1995 book *Robert Wise on His Films: From Editing Room to Director's Chair*, Wise told the author, "I was reading one of the very scary passages – hackles were going up and down my neck – when [screenwriter] Nelson Gidding burst through the door to ask me a question. I literally jumped about three feet out of my chair. I said, 'If it can do that to me sitting and reading, it ought to be something I want to make a picture out of.'"

The Haunting is the tale of Eleanor "Nell" Lance (Julie Harris), a timid and virginal young woman who has spent eleven years caring for her cantankerous, sickly mother. Following the woman's death (for which she may have been partially responsible, through intentional neglect), she finds herself with no friends, no suitor and no place to live. Receiving a letter from Dr. John Markway (Richard Johnson), she is invited to stay in the infamous Hill House to partake in a scientific experiment he's conducting. Eleanor asks her sister if it is possible to borrow the car (which she owns in part) to make the journey, a request that is flatly denied. The next morning, Eleanor, in an outburst of uncharacteristic rebellion, takes the vehicle and begins her travels into the unknown.





Grounds Creepers: *The foreboding Hill House, (clockwise from bottom left) Theo (Claire Bloom), Dr. John Markway (Richard Johnson), Eleanor (Julie Harris) and Luke (Russ Tamblyn) encounter a statue in the indoor garden, and (opposite) Theo and Eleanor cower at the sounds of an unseen force.*

Eleanor displays a childlike innocence, combined with a slightly broken psyche, due to years of denigration. She idly fantasizes about the potential new life that exists for her. Her arrival is met with sneers and obstinacy by the groundskeeper Mr. Dudley (Valentine Dyall), who reluctantly lets her through the gates with a warning of the danger ahead.

Her anticipation turns to instantaneous trepidation as she approaches the menacing structure that leers down at her – the towers and windows taking on lifelike forms, even in broad daylight. She makes an attempt to set aside her reservations, despite being certain that the house is "vile and diseased."

"There was an atmosphere created by that place," recalls Bloom. "The house was extremely dreadful, it really was. It had a terrible, terrible feeling about it."

That iconic location was actually Ettington Hall (which was later turned into Ettington Park Hotel), located in the village of Ettington, Warwickshire, in the UK. MGM would only grant Wise a budget of $1 million, which he objected to. After appealing to MGM in London, they agreed to allocate him $1.1 million, and so he shipped the production to the UK. The storyline and the events contained within the movie are still, however, set in the United States (New England, to be precise). Lavish, expensively furnished soundstages were built at Borehamwood Studios for the interior shots.

After Nell arrives, we meet the rest of the guests. Dr. Markway, an anthropologist investigating the paranormal, has rented Hill House to find out if it's haunted. The condition is that he's accompanied by the heir to the mansion, Luke Sanderson (Russ Tamblyn), a young playboy who cannot wait to strip the place of its antiquities and sell it.









The only other guest is Theodora – no last name – who answers to "Theo" and has been invited due to her psychic abilities.

One of the most groundbreaking aspects of *The Haunting* is that it becomes apparent that Theo – who oozes a predatory, sexual energy – is attracted to Nell, a taboo storyline for the time. (The film dispensed with a subplot from the novel in which Theo leaves for Hill House after a spat with her girlfriend.)

"It was offered to me through my agent, the same as any other role, really, but for the time it was quite shocking," states Bloom with a playful laugh, "but things have changed a great deal, haven't they?"

The actor is also quite proud of her character's look.

"I suggested Mary Quant, who was a designer of young people's clothes at that time, and very stylish," she notes, regarding Theo's wardrobe being outfitted by the woman responsible for inventing, among other things, the mini-skirt. "I think that they're wonderful [outfits] in the film. They look somewhat dated now, because they were so extreme. Especially that zebra style coat and hat, but they give a feeling of that period and they were wonderful clothes. That was my input into the look of the film."

Once the players are introduced, they begin to feel the effects of the sinister house. Nell, the most receptive and psychologically defenseless of the group, is an easy target. As noises are heard, a cold spot is felt and things move on their own, she begins to crumble. On top of this, Theo, who sees that Nell's affections are for Dr Markway, becomes cruel and playful, using her psychic gifts to taunt Nell about her lack of guilt over her mother's death, only adding to the fragile woman's increasingly detached and unstable mental state.

The Haunting is also famous for its off-camera tension, particularly between Harris and her co-stars.

"It was only the four of us," remembers Bloom of the core cast. "That was kind of fun, but, there was some tension, because Julie Harris, who is a marvellous woman and a wonderful actress, decided to remain in-character for the whole of the film. I thought, 'Oh God, she really hates me,' but in the end, she came to the door of my mother's shop – my mother had an antique shop – with the most beautiful Victorian beaded cushion as a gift, and said, 'I'm so sorry, but that's the way I work and I really am very fond of you.' I was very touched by that."

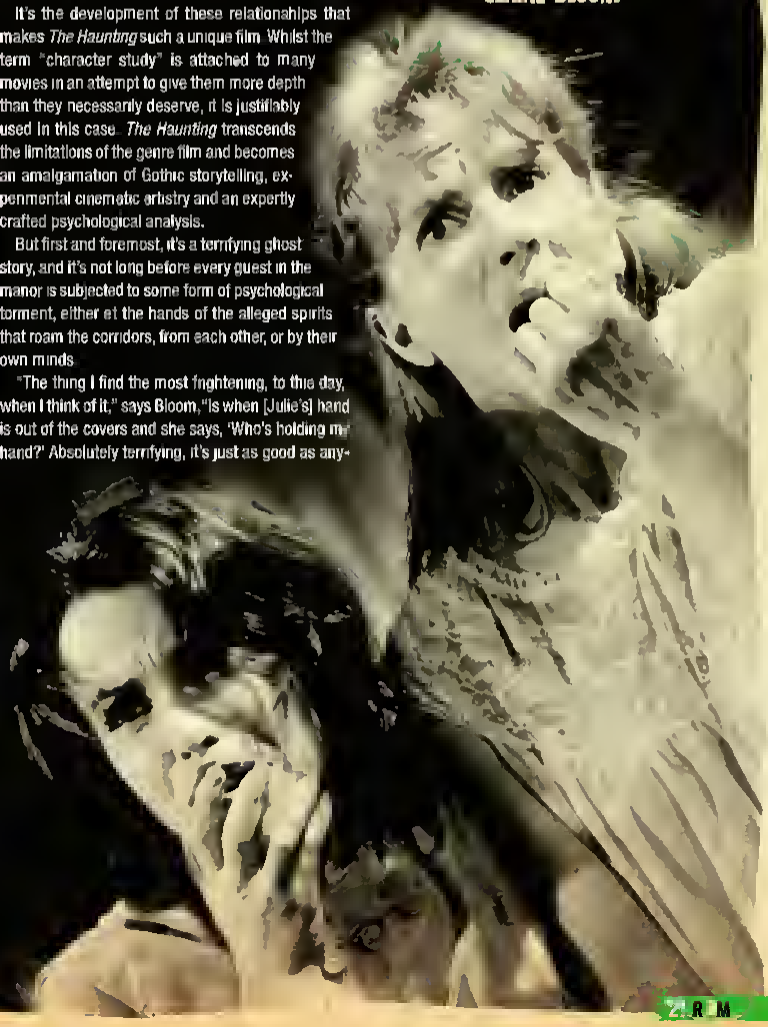
That tension is core to a film that slowly cranks up the unease before descending into outright terror. The arrival of the doctor's sceptical wife (Lois Maxwell, who will forever be known as Miss Moneypenny from the James Bond movies) only tweaks an already simmering atmosphere, as she tempts fate with her derision towards the house and the apparent haunting. As the doctor is clearly interested in paying more attention to Nell than his spouse, another layer to the characters is revealed.

It's the development of these relationships that makes *The Haunting* such a unique film. Whilst the term "character study" is attached to many movies in an attempt to give them more depth than they necessarily deserve, it is justifiably used in this case. *The Haunting* transcends the limitations of the genre film and becomes an amalgamation of Gothic storytelling, experimental cinematic artistry and an expertly crafted psychological analysis.

But first and foremost, it's a terrifying ghost story, and it's not long before every guest in the manor is subjected to some form of psychological torment, either at the hands of the alleged spirits that roam the corridors, from each other, or by their own minds.

"The thing I find the most frightening, to this day, when I think of it," says Bloom, "is when [Julie's] hand is out of the covers and she says, 'Who's holding my hand?' Absolutely terrifying, it's just as good as any-

> "THE HOUSE WAS EXTREMELY DREADFUL, IT REALLY WAS. IT HAD A TERRIBLE, TERRIBLE FEELING ABOUT IT."
> CLAIRE BLOOM



thing in *The Turn of the Screw*, which has frightened me my entire life."

Much of what makes the film so affecting, of course, is the atmosphere inside the house, all of which was created on the Borehamwood soundstages. To make the sets feel more authentic and claustrophobic, Wise had production designer Elliot Scott and set decorator John Jarvis go to great lengths to create believable mansion interiors, including building them with ceilings, which was unusual.

"It certainly gave us a feeling of what being in such a house, in such a situation would be like," affirms Bloom, adding that the actors still had to imagine other key elements. "Of course, we didn't have any of the sound effects on set: the walls moving, doors creaking or whatever it may have been at the time. That was all put in much later. Julie and I had to imagine all of these things, which Robert Wise explained to us in great detail. He would tell us about the voices and the movements that were taking place."

Wise wanted to experiment in terms of the way he shot the movie, and he approached Panavision in search of a new format of 30mm lens, which he intended to use to capture wide, sprawling shots of Hill House's interiors. He was informed, however, that whilst a new 30mm version was in existence, it was not finalized and caused a great deal of distortion. This was exactly what the director wanted and he immediately agreed to use it.

He pointed out in *Robert Wise on His Films: From Editing Room to Director's Chair*, "I shot the film in Panavision and, at that time, there wasn't any wide-angle lens in anamorphic — I wanted to make those hallways look long and dark and dank. ... The exterior was a several-hundred-years-old manor house out in the country. It was a pretty horrifying-looking thing under certain kinds of lights, and I accentuated that by shooting some of the exteriors with infra-red film."

Wise used an array of visual and audio trickery to enhance the sense of disorientation and bewilderment. Layers of sound are placed upon one another, sometimes resulting in several characters speaking over each other. Shots – by cinematographer Davis Boulton – of long hallways and grandiose rooms are twisted and malformed, creating nightmarish surroundings that captivate the on-looker every bit as much as the characters. Double exposure is used to superimpose sinister cherubic faces onto threatening staircases. Mirrors are placed in great numbers throughout the film to add both depth and atmosphere, becoming a device that suggests that not only is there no real escape from Hill House, but that there is always someone watching as well.

> "IT'S REALLY COME INTO ITS OWN AS A WORK OF ART WITHIN THE GENRE WITHIN THE LAST FEW DECADES. I THINK IT CAPTURED THE SPIRIT OF THE LITERATURE, OF THE GOTHIC HORROR."
>
> CLAIRE BLOOM

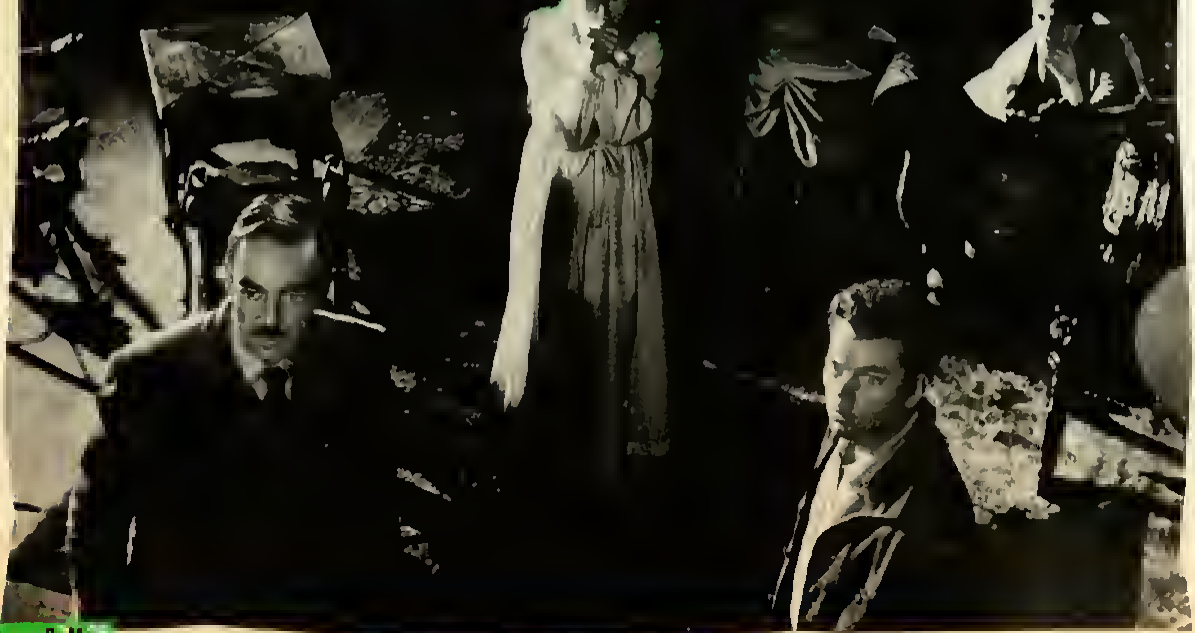
Even half a century later, *The Haunting* retains its ability to cause discomfort, unease and fear. The performances, whilst criticized by some at the time for being overly melodramatic, only serve to heighten the looming hysteria that pervades the movie.

"It's really come into its own as a work of art within the genre within the last few decades," says Bloom. "I think it captured the spirit of the literature, of the Gothic horror. The screenplay is so stylized. It has a particular kind of rhythm, comprised of rather short sentences. It's hard to explain, but there's a particular brevity of speech used. You don't need a lot, and it's very rhythmical and helps to create that dreamlike state. Julie's performance was so beautiful as well."

Certainly *The Haunting* remains one of the finest ghost stories ever adapted for the screen and stands alongside Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* (1961, based Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*) as an archetypal haunted house movie. The strengths of *The Haunting* lie in what you are *not* shown, as opposed to what you see. Boulton's cinematography and Wise's creative and innovative direction bring such a sinister nature to the house that it becomes as much of a character as its human counterparts.

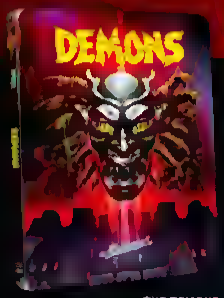
"I adored him. He was the sweetest, kindest man," Bloom says of working with Wise. "I was in awe of him because of *Citizen Kane*, and *West Side Story* of course, but mainly because he'd worked with Orson Welles on such a great, great film. He was very nice indeed, and very kind to me through the whole thing."

A genuinely terrifying film 50 years later, *The Haunting* is as captivating and enchanting as the legends that lie within Hill House itself.

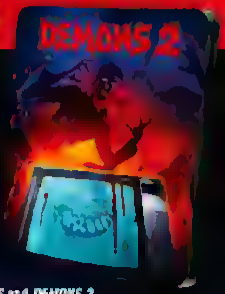




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INSIDIOUS DIRECTOR JAMES WAN AND STAR PATRICK WILSON ONCE AGAIN CHANNEL THE SPIRIT OF OLD-SCHOOL STUDIO HORROR WITH *The Conjuring*

Living with the Dead

By APRIL SNELLINGS



James Wan has never made the same film twice. The 36-year-old Australian has built a reputation on being predictably unpredictable; he announced his formidable presence in the horror world with his 2004 debut *Saw*, unleashing a wave – perhaps "tsunami" is a better word – of imitators before promptly abandoning the world of gory, hard-R horror. His next film was 2007's famously studio-diddled ventriloquist ghost yarn *Dead Silence*, followed by the same year's *Death Sentence*, a relentlessly grim meditation on the futility of revenge. Neither effort came close to duplicating *Saw*'s remarkable box-office success, that would come four years later with *Insidious*, a bloodless but terrifying throwback to old-fashioned supernatural horror, which earned massive returns on its miniscule budget.

So it was surprising, then, when Wan attached himself to *The Conjuring*, out this month from Warner Brothers/New Line. At first glance, it seems he's doubled back to familiar territory, like *Insidious*, it's an old-school tale of a family that moves to a new home, only to find themselves beset by restless spirits. Both films deal with the horrifying prospect of sharing one's own skin with an otherworldly entity that means to harm. There's at least one big difference, though: while *Insidious* was the construct of writer (and Wan's frequent collaborator) Leigh Whannell's imagination, *The Conjuring* was inspired by the real-life exploits of famed ghosthunters Ed and Lorraine Warren.

"I didn't really want to make another haunted house or ghost story movie, but the fact that it's the Warrens is what attracted me to it," explains Wan during a phone interview from Los Angeles, where's he's gearing up to helm *Fast & Furious 7*. "I don't see *The Conjuring* as a ghost story or a haunted house film, I see it basically as a true-life story about these two people who are very fascinating."

While the Warrens, whose 1976 investigation of the controversial Amityville haunting made them fixtures in the field of paranormal research, tackled thousands of cases throughout their decades-long career, *The Conjuring* focuses on the couples' involvement with the Perron family. The film begins in 1971,



Bad Noose: Ed Warren (Patrick Wilson) has a brush with the ghost of a witch.

just a few months after Carolyn Perron (Lili Taylor: *The Haunting* remake, *Hemlock Grove*—pictured opposite) and her husband Roger (Ron Livingston: *Adaptation*, TV's *Band of Brothers*) move their five daughters into a remote Rhode Island farmhouse. The family finds the home to be bustling with ghosts, while most of their unexpected housemates are benign, one—the spirit of a witch named Bathsheba Sherman, who hanged herself on the property many decades earlier—takes a dislike to Carolyn, and soon begins to terrorize the family. Since the Perrons have sunk all of their assets into the property, moving isn't an option. So the family turns to Ed and Lorraine Warren, founders of the New England Center for Psychic Research, for help. The Warrens find that the case isn't a simple haunting; as the months tick by, it becomes increasingly clear that something has taken up residence not just in Carolyn's home, but in Carolyn herself.



Wan, who professes an interest in the paranormal, has been on the lookout for a Warrens project for years.

"When you deal in this world, it's kind of hard not to have heard about the Warrens," he says. "Whenever you're researching the supernatural, their names will come up, and so I've been a fan of their story for a while. I've been keeping an eye out for any particular movies based on their lives. I've been tracking it over the years and quietly following it, and finally it ended up in a place, and I was in a position, where I could actually pursue it."

To cast the famed couple, Wan turned to Vera Farmiga (*Orphan*, TV's *Bates Motel*) and *Insidious* star Patrick Wilson (*Hard Candy*, *Watchmen*). Wilson, who will re-team with Wan once again for *Insidious: Chapter 2*, was also attracted to *The Conjuring* by the project's true-story conceit.

"If I was going to do it, it needed to be something really different, even within the horror genre," Wilson pointed out during a roundtable interview last year on *The Conjuring*'s North Carolina set. "Talking to [Wan], and knowing there hadn't really been a story told like this, where you not only get the emotional connection with the family in peril, but really the exorcists—the ghosthunters—as well, that was a different take on it. ... And doing a character based on a real guy that seemed so far from me...how I could both make him my own and honour the spirit of him, finding those little details that make it different than just seeing Patrick Wilson in a horror movie."

The film's director and star also feel that, for aficionados of ghost tales, *The Conjuring* will be a welcome window into a less cynical time. Since the modern fascination with all things paranormal really kicked off with the Amityville haunting (which the Warrens insisted was not a hoax), Wilson thinks the story might be a more genuine account of the things that lurk just beyond the light.

"Because of the internet and reality TV, it's hard for anyone to tell what's real and what's not," notes the actor. "I can't watch that stuff, because all I can think about is how they did it camera-wise, and what the trick is, even if it's real. The thing that appealed to me about this is, you're dealing with 1971, so it's before all of that, so any fascination with this world came from either people who felt like they were being possessed, or people that really, genuinely saw something and didn't know what it was, and maybe needed some help or just some questions answered, and that's where the Warrens stepped in."

With all this talk of the film's factual basis, and given Hollywood's penchant for exaggeration,



Unboxed: Lorraine Warren (Vera Farmiga) makes a mesmerizing discovery and (left) Carolyn Perron (Lili Taylor) fears the basement.

you can't be blamed for wondering how much Wan and screenwriters Chad and Carey Hayes had to embellish to make sure Warner Brothers and New Line were getting their money's worth. Wan insists he had the opposite problem.

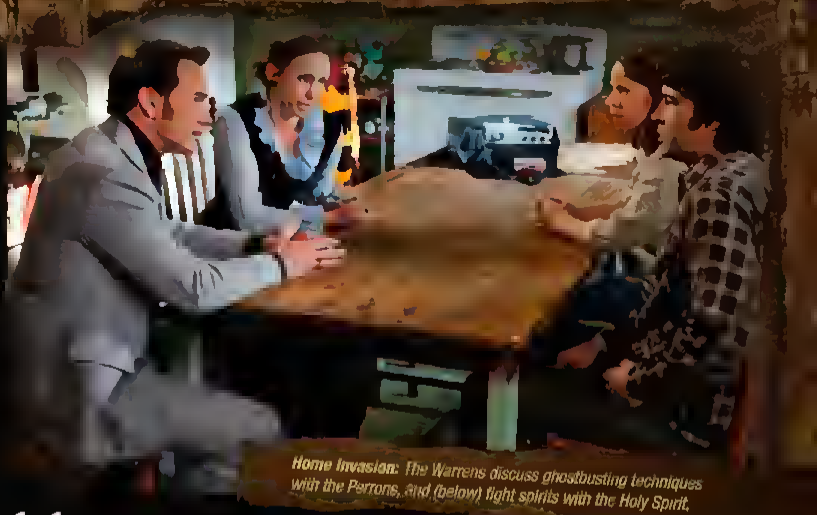
"I actually had to tone down some aspects of [the story]. I felt that for the movie to be effective, it needed to be grounded. If I started having stories that are just too out there, that an audience might not believe, then it doesn't matter what scares I come up with or how I shoot it. People are just going to think I fabricated everything, and I don't want that. I was very cautious to not give that impression."

But that's not to say *The Conjuring* hasn't given Wan plenty of opportunities to ply his trade as an architect of timely choreographed scares. For all its attempts at accuracy – both the Perron family and Lorraine Warren (Ed died in 2006) were closely involved with the film's production – Wan hopes that *The Conjuring* is, first and foremost, a hell of a ride.

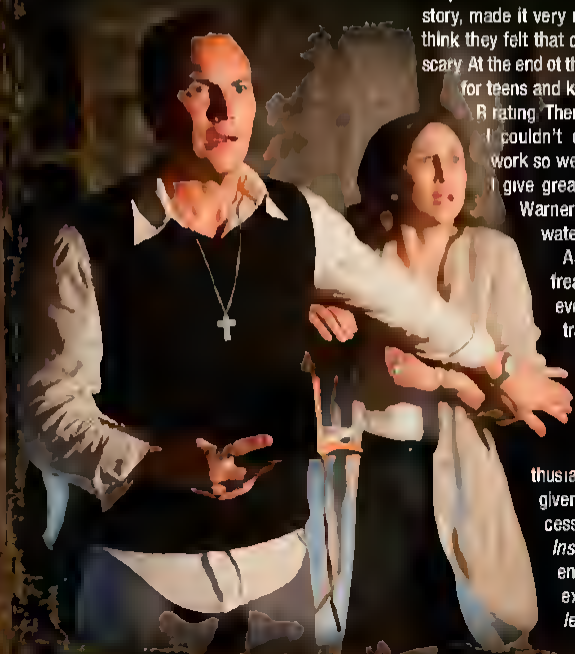
"This is what I do," he explains. "I take a story, I walk into a script, and basically I filter it through myself. They tell me they experienced this. My job as a director is to work out the best way I can maximize that particular scare, that story they've just told me, right? And basically, how would I bring that to the screen in a way that has great entertainment value – that an audience watching it will be on the edge of their seat. Let's face it – at the end of the day, it's a movie. It's not a documentary."

The movie's attempts at veracity have had at least one unexpected consequence, though. It was widely assumed that *The Conjuring*, like *Insidious*, would earn a PG-13 rating – a badge that might turn off some horror fans but guarantees a stronger box office performance. However, after viewing the final cut, the MPAA was quick to slap the movie with an R. It was a decision that surprised Wan, but hasn't prompted any edits.

"I don't think there's a single drop of blood in the movie," says the filmmaker. "It's not even violent, per se. But I think there's a pervasive intensity to the horror of the film, and I think that, coupled with the fact that it's based on a true story, made it very intense for the MPAA, so I think they felt that combination makes it very scary. At the end of the day, if it's too frightening for teens and kids, then they give you the R rating. There wasn't much I could do. I couldn't cut anything. The scares work so well and they're so effective. I give great kudos to New Line and Warner Brothers for not trying to water it down to get a PG-13."



Home Invasion: The Warrens discuss ghostbusting techniques with the Perrons, and (below) fight spirits with the Holy Spirit.



> "What makes The Conjuring really impressive to me is that it feels like an old-school studio horror film like they used to make in the '70s." -James Wan

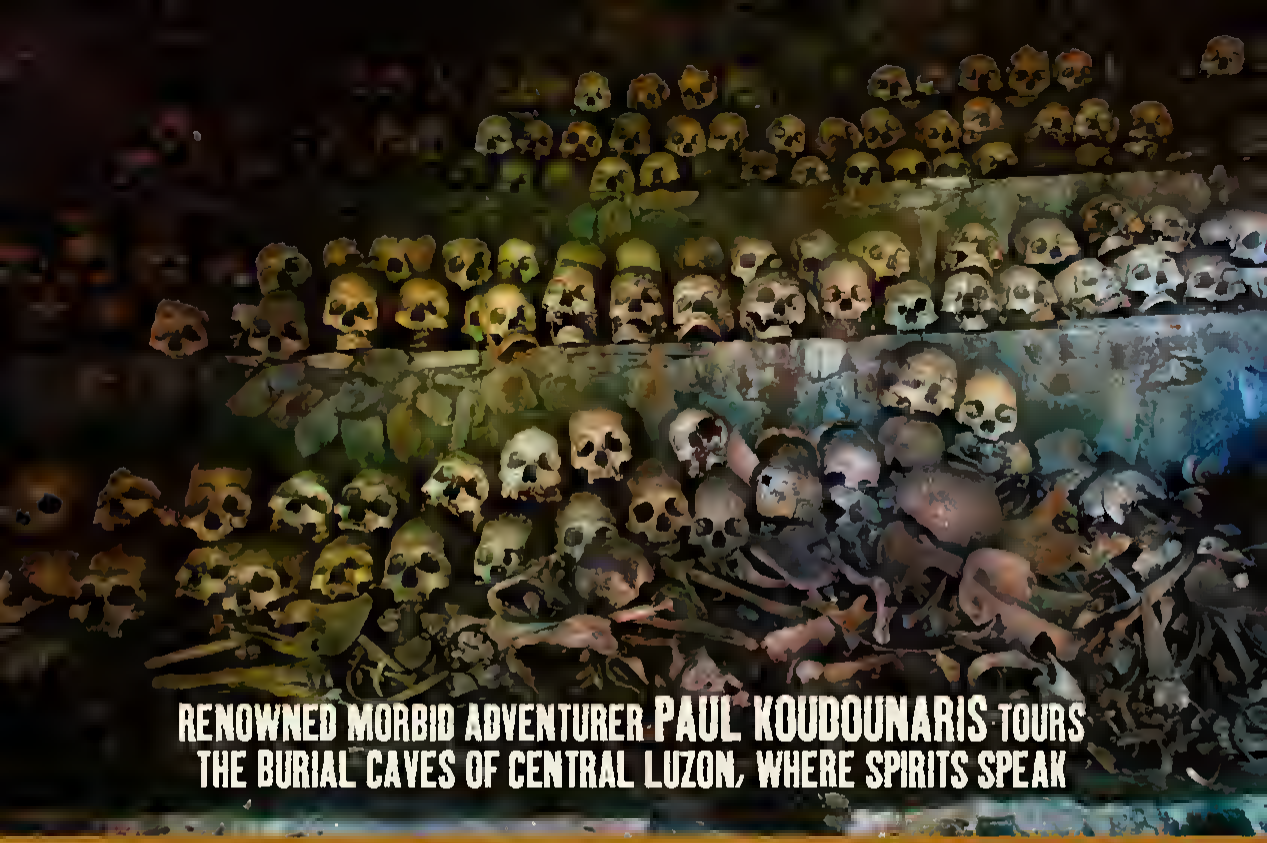
Aside from the chance to freak out audiences with events that supposedly really transpired, *The Conjuring* offered Wan another opportunity that he was eager to take: the chance to return to the world of studio filmmaking. His enthusiasm might be surprising, given that his two most successful films to date – *Saw* and *Insidious* – were independently financed, and that his experience with *Dead Silence* reportedly epitomized every indie filmmaker's fear of studio meddling. But while Wan understands the fan community's knee-jerk aversion to studio horror, he doesn't share it.

"I always like to remind people that all these great horror movies they grew up with were all studio films," he notes. "*The Exorcist*, *Poltergeist*, *Jaws* – they were all studio horror films. I think over the years something obviously changed, and I think studio horror films became watered down, so the only kind of movies that could take chances were indie films. But I would like to point out that what makes *The Conjuring* really impressive to me is that it feels like an old-school studio horror film like they used to make in the '70s. It doesn't compromise. … I'm very proud of that, and I love the fact that New Line was with me all the way. They were working with me, and coming up with really clever story ideas, how we can shoot it, stuff like that. I will credit a big chunk of this film's effectiveness to the studio. I know not many horror directors would say that, but I would."

While Wan has two horror films hitting screens this year – *Insidious: Chapter 2* is slated for a September release – it could be a while before he revisits the genre. He promises it's a temporary separation, though, and not a divorce.

"Now that I'm doing *Fast & Furious 7*, I could not be further out of this world," he admits. "I'm a big fan of the horror genre. I love it. I just want to take a break from it now so I can come back to it, hopefully with a renewed vision of what the genre can be."


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RENOWNED MORBID ADVENTURER PAUL KOUDOUNARIS TOURS THE BURIAL CAVES OF CENTRAL LUZON, WHERE SPIRITS SPEAK

MUMMIES OF THE MOUNTAIN

BY PAUL KOUDOUNARIS

"MY FATHER SAID HE USED TO HEAR CRYING. I used to hear the crying also. Not like a child, but the voices of many people crying. That is why my father started to dig, and that is when he found the cave and the hundreds of skulls." Rowena Berong was describing how her father Baban discovered a centuries-old burial site on their property in the township of Kabayan, in the Benguet Province on the Philippine island of Luzon. I had come here seeking exactly these kinds of stories, in this remote area where the divide between the living and the dead is thinly veiled, and those who have passed on beg to be remembered.

Baban Berong had unearthed what is now known as the Opdas Cave, a site of secondary burial where hundreds of skulls and other bones had been placed. "The crying stopped after my father died. The crying was for him I guess."

Centred around Mt. Pulag, Luzon's highest peak, this area is the seat of Ibaloi tribal culture, and the natives steadfastly maintain their traditionally intimate relationship with those who have passed on. The region is pockmarked with sacred burial caves. Some are accessible to outsiders, but most are known only to locals who reveal their locations only to a trusted few, so as not to disturb the sanctity of the dead. Even if access is granted, getting there isn't easy. I had taken a bus from Manila to Baguio, a bustling university town, which is the nearest major city. From there, however, things got difficult. There are further buses directly from Baguio to Kabayan, but even though the direct distance is relatively short – barely 25 kilometres – it can take up to six hours due to road conditions.

From Kabayan, transport within the province is even more taxing. I had hired a guide with a four-wheel-drive vehicle to navigate the unpaved roads, but since the caves are on the sides of the mountains themselves, in the end, we went by foot.

Many of the caves contain mummies, dated from 500 to 1000 years old. The most famous are at the village of Timbac, and despite the gruelling five-hour hike nearly straight up from Kabayan, a fair number of outsiders make the journey. An Ibaloi woman who works in conservation for the Philippine National Museum told me that it could be arranged with the locals for me to also visit some of the lesser-known mummy caves – one, Ngalab, was discovered only two years ago, and thus far had not been entered by foreigners.

The route to Ngalab is so obscure that I wound up with an entourage of five people. In addition to my original guide, there was one who was familiar with the path to the trailhead, and another who could navigate the rest of the way from there. As for the other two, they preceded us with machetes to clear the way since the path is so overgrown.

"We don't just respect the dead," one said, as he whacked at the brush. "We are responsive to them. The dead will communicate with us, and if we do what they advise, we will have good fortune. Also, what the living feel is often a reflection of what the dead feel. For instance, if someone gets sick, we consult a mambunong [native priest] who will go into a trance to determine why. He may have a vision of an ancestor who is perhaps cold in his tomb. Or if someone among the living itches or has a skin disease, maybe the tomb of an ancestor is infested with insects and he wishes them removed. The living experience signs. So we will visit the tomb



Resting Place: *Cave mouth burials at Sagada, and (inset) a male and female mummy in their respective coffins at Ngalab Cave*

…bounced decoration, sometimes including sculpted animals at the …. "These were often designed by the same people who were placed …them," one of the guides explained. "Sometimes when people became …ld, and retired from the fields, they would then spend time designing their own …coffin. But if it is coffins you want, you must go to Sagada."

While the township of Sagada is only 40 km from Kabayan, the road through the mountain by bus is so rough that it takes a bone-rattling six hours to get there. It's here that coffins are most prominently – and dramatically – displayed. The Sugong Hanging Coffins on the outskirts of the village are among the world's most unexpected funerary displays; appearing to dangle in mid-air, they are dwarfed by the magnitude of the cliff walls behind them and seem unreal, like large funerary wind chimes.

The coffins are not actually hanging, though; they are carefully perched in crevices in the rock wall, and stable enough to have maintained their places for at least a century. Those which are visible are, in fact, only a fraction of the total, since many more are placed behind them in fissures. Even greater numbers are found nearby in the Lumiang Burial Cave. A deep, ominous, gaping maw in the earth, Lumiang is choked at its mouth with a mass of wooden coffins, piled upward in great numbers on the cave floor, while others are wedged into ledges around the opening itself.

The cave was deserted, save for a local who had come to tend to the site, apparently an unofficial caretaker. He sat next to me and summed up the relationship with the dead in rugged Central Luzon. "The coffin is like the womb, it is like returning to the womb of the mother. These caves also are like an entrance back into the mother, the earth itself. So this for us is a natural place for the dead."

Getting there: There are numerous buses from Manila to Baguio (some companies, such as Victory Liner, offer express, luxury buses). From Baguio, transport is available to either Kabayan or Sagada via both buses and mini-vans. There is no public transport within the tribal towns, and visiting burial sites requires enlisting a local guide.

…dead in order for …of the living."

…, we paused at a small hut and acquired a bottle of gin. "It is an offering for the spirits of the mummies in the cave – we are disturbing them, so we must offer them something."

The dead want gin?

"Normally chicken and rice wine. But this will do."

Another surprise awaited me at the end of the trail. The mouth of the cave was covered with rocks that had to be moved. They had been placed there to camouflage the opening, so that no one but the locals would know that this is a burial site.

"Have you heard the story of Apu Anno?" one of the guides asked.

Apu Anno was a tribal chief whose body was preserved perhaps 500 years ago. His mummy was discovered in a cave in nearby Natubling in the early 20th century, and was remarkable for its tattooing, which was a sign of high office. This also made his corpse a novelty, however, and it was stolen by a Christian pastor around 1920 and taken to Manila. Eventually it was sold to a circus sideshow. This was, not surprisingly, considered an extreme offense by tribal members. When the following decades brought a series of natural disasters – droughts, earthquakes and famines – it was believed the cause was the removal of Apu Anno's body. The mummy was acquired by the National Museum of the Philippines, which returned it to its burial site, where it is now kept behind a secure fence.

As we carefully returned the stones after viewing the mummies, I asked about the designs on the five coffins within. The sides were delicately articulated, traced out with lightly carved patterns. Others I had seen locally had even more pro-

MEMENTO MORGUE

Texas Frightmare Weekend



Texas Frightmare Weekend/RM contest winner Natascha Marley (right) with Dave Alexander, Aaron Von Lupton and her daughter Tatjana.



Aaron's slasher panel with (L to R) Nick Castle (**Halloween**) Ted White (**Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter**) and Lou David (**The Burning**)



Danny Trejo with RM's Jody Infurnari



(L to R) Carolyn Purdy-Gordon, Stuart Gordon Texas Frightmare Weekend founder Loyd Cryer and Jeffrey Combs

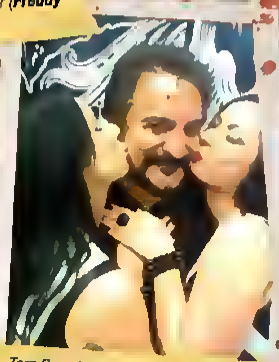


Slasher stuntmen (L to R) Peter Kent (**Re-Animator**), Brad Loree (**Halloween: Resurrection**), Ken Kirzinger (**Freddy vs. Jason**) at the RM booth



Mary Madness (Shades of Grey Tattoos) and RM's Ron McKenzie

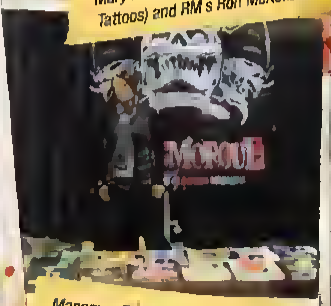




Tom Savini meets the Soska Twins (**American Mary**) at the RM booth



Dave with Michael Rooker (**The Walking Dead**), after the actor's panel



Managing Editor Monica S. Kuebler at the RM booth in a rare quiet moment

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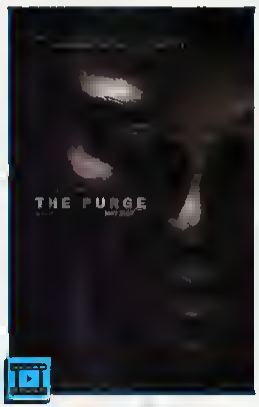


DOMESTIC ULTRA-VIOLENCE

THE PURGE

Starring Ethan Hawke, Lena Headey and Rhys Wakefield
Written and directed by James DeMonaco
Universal

Ever since the better-than-expected *Paranormal Activity* sequels and the efficient *Insidious*, Blumhouse Productions has become a reliable house of horrors, providing slick genre thrills on a budget. *The Purge* is their latest effort, a slice of home-invasion horror with a socially conscious sci-fi twist. Given the potential of the big central concept, it's a shame the flick falls back on so many familiar tropes, but at least they're executed well.



The story is set in a near-future US where skyrocketing poverty and crime rates were ostensibly curbed by The Purge, an annual night of lawlessness that allows the American public twelve hours to let their baser instincts – especially bloodlust – run wild. Ethan Hawke stars as James Sandin, a wealthy family man who made millions off of security systems that protect the rich from The Purge, but this year will be different. His oddball son Charlie (Max Burkholder) gives a homeless man sanctuary in their house, and soon they are surrounded by masked Purgers who demand that their intended victim be returned to them, or the entire Sandin family will share his fate.

As he proved with his script for the surprisingly decent *Assault on Precinct 13* remake, writer/director James DeMonaco understands the appeal of siege horror and keeps the suspense, action and body count pumping once the trouble starts. The cast is strong across the board, Hawke does his Dustin-Hoffman-in-*Straw-Dogs* impression well, *Game of Thrones*' Lena Headey handles her mama-ass-kicker duties with ease as James' wife, and Rhys Wakefield provides a nice Patrick Bateman-lite turn as the head Purger.

But while the movie competently hits all the notes we expect from the home-invasion subgenre, it never really stretches beyond that, despite the concept's epic potential. (Perhaps the big stuff was saved for the sequel, which is already in development.) In the end, your enjoyment of *The Purge* comes down to how much you'd like to see a mash-up of *The Visitors*, *Straw Dogs* and *Funny Games* with a dash of cynical *Escape From New York*-style futurism. You won't get much more than the expected beats the concept suggests, but at least you'll get those in a tight, 85-minute package that doesn't disappoint. So that's something.

PHIL BROWN

FOREVER ON THE LIPS

KISS OF THE DAMNED

Starring Josephine de La Baume, Milo Ventimiglia and Roxane Mesquida
Written and directed by Xan Cassavetes
Magnet Releasing



Immortality, lust and excess: Xan Cassavetes makes a powerful first foray into the world of genre filmmaking with *Kiss of the Damned*. Pulling obvious influence from European horror heavies of the late '60s and '70s, Cassavetes (yes, daughter of John) takes the over-gored and underwhelmed bastardized vampires of today, and throws them back to their gothic romantic roots – with a heavy dose of style.

House-sitting a Connecticut mansion, vampire Djuna (Josephine de la Baume) spends her nights alone watching black and white DVD rentals and feasting on forest critters. With late fees accruing at the local rental shop, she catches the eye of Paolo (Milo Ventimiglia), a visiting screenwriter se-

questered nearby to write his next big blockbuster movie. A whirlwind romance ensues and he immediately opts for a life of immortality with her. But their happily-ever-after moment is interrupted when Djuna's rehab-bound sister Mimi (Roxane Mesquida) shows up unannounced in need of a place to stay. She then sets about corrupting the peaceful balance of the bourgeois vampire community with blood, sex and death.

With little need for copious amounts of the red stuff, Cassavetes replaces blood 'n' guts with sexuality, style and conflict. Her vampires are heavily accented, tortured Euro-femme fatales. Her sex is passion personified, leaving you either in need of a cigarette or a cold shower. And her style is a little *The Hunger* and a lot giallo. From clever cinematography to moody lighting and choppy edits, *Kiss of the Damned* is soaked in lush visuals that overshadow a lack of fully fleshed-out characters.

It's all set to a melodramatic soundtrack composed by Steve Hufsteter – an eclectic mix of hypnotic tracks, jarring notes, '70s disco and '80s punk. Add to that Akiko Stehrenberger's retro-style illustrated poster, which perfectly expresses not just the duality of Cassavetes' vampires but also movie's vintage feel.

Unencumbered by Hollywood flash, CGI and modern tech (not a single cellphone to be seen!), the film is almost timeless, and is certainly destined to be a cult hit. *Kiss of the Damned* joins such works as *Byzantium* and *Let The Right One In* on the short list of contemporary must-see vampire films.

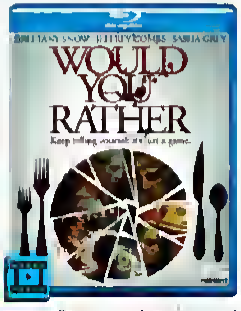
KAT VON PIRE

GRUE UNTO OTHERS...

WOULD YOU RATHER

Starring Brittany Snow, Jeffrey Combs and Jonathan Coyne
Directed by David Guy Levy
Written by Steffen Schlachtenhaufen
IFC Midnight

When given the choice between two equally undesirable evils, what would you do? That's the question that drives *Would You Rather* and, like the game of questions it takes its inspiration from, at its conclusion there's little left but time spent and a sense of futility.



Orphaned, broke and saddled with the care of her terminally ill younger brother, Iris (Brittany Snow) accepts an invitation to attend an evening sponsored by the Lambrick Foundation. The event is a contest that could dramatically improve her situation by providing funds for her brother's treatment. Once there, she finds herself pitted against other desperate guests in a sadistic game of "Would You Rather." It quickly becomes apparent that in this version of the game only one guest will remain alive to enjoy the "benevolence" of host Shepard Lambrick (*Re-Animator*'s Jeffrey Combs).

The tension steadily mounts as the guests are pitted against each other in a series of increasingly grisly dilemmas. Would you rather electrocute yourself or someone else who's already injured? Stab yourself in the leg with a poker or dole out the same abuse to the old lady in the wheelchair?

Unlike the similarly themed *Saw* franchise, *Would You Rather* doesn't dwell on the gore, cutting away from the brutality most of the time. But while the concept is strong and the performances convincing (Combs in particular is a joy to watch), Lambrick's purely sadistic impetus for staging the game keeps the film from ever truly rising above its torture-porn trappings.

If *Would You Rather* can be thought of as an allegory for the one percent's domination of the other 99 percent (as Combs himself has suggested), it presents the viewer with a bleak prospect of the world, as every decision we make brings us that much closer to suffering and death, and there truly is no one to appeal to.

Then again, maybe that's a point in the movie's favour. After all, is there anything more horrific to ponder nowadays than a life of futility?

JASON PICHONSKY

UNDEAD DOLDRUMS

13 EERIE

Starring Katharine Isabelle, Michael Shanks and Brendan Fehr
Directed by Lowell Dean
Written by Christien Piers Betley
Entertainment One

The classic structure popularized by *Night of the Living Dead* – an isolated group of characters must work together to survive – is one that almost all zombie flicks since have borrowed, and why not? It's a great one. The problem, however, is that so many filmmakers seem to misunderstand the purpose of using zombies in the first place, and this holds true with *13 Eerie*.



A desolate island correctional facility known as 13 Eerie Strait is the setting for this tale of a group of forensic biology students – populated by such familiar faces as *Ginger Snaps*' Katharine Isabelle and Brendan Fehr from TV's *Roswell* – on a strange weekend competition for a highly coveted FBI trainee position. Running the contest is FBI guy Tomkins (*Stargate SG-1*'s Michael Shanks), who has planted dead bodies around the compound, like a morbid Easter-egg hunt, for the students to find and determine the cause of death. Things turn sour when a corrosive black sludge, strewn about the island in metal barrels, incinerates the group's generator and a couple of monstrous-looking cadavers come to life, attack, and turn their victims into undead ghouls. The inexperienced team are, of course, forced to work out their differences and cooperate to get off the island alive.

13 Eerie makes the common mistake of making the zombies the star of the show. The characters, a mix of one-dimensional clichés (Shanks as the stern leader, Fehr as the cocky jock, Isabelle as the strong overachiever) are an uninteresting bunch, and the zombies are garden variety. The best zombie films place their shamblers in the background and let the characters run the show, but this film centres mostly around run-of-the-mill zombie mayhem, which, on its own, isn't very fun.

If there were a couple of mutated former inmates wreaking havoc on the scientific team instead, *13 Eerie* might have been much better. But as it stands, it's little more than a prison island-themed addition to the hordes of average zombie flicks that are already crowding your Netflix queue.

PATRICK DOLAN


13 Eerie: A prison-island-themed zombie flick.



OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE MOCKS SOME MONSTER MUTANTS

FROSTBITTEN



SNOW SHARK: ANCIENT SNOW BEAST

Independent Entertainment

Some like their horror-comedies slick like *Shaun of the Dead* or *Dead Alive*, while others prefer them to be stupid, like this one. I mean, come on: it's called *Snow Shark*, for Chnst's sake! In it, an earthquake has released the ancient prehistoric creature that's been terronzing a small town for more than a decade, munching on both the cryptozoologists trying to study it and keep it alive, and the rednecks trying to kill it. Though the cast's acting chops are seriously lacking, kudos to the special effects crew for pulling off the various gruesome, blood-spurting kills and mangled limbs, as well as that seriously demented-looking shark, which plunges in and out of surrounding snowbanks. This one's better than eating yellow snow – but not by much.

BODY COUNT: 15

MOST EMBARRASSING DEATH: Chomped while peeing

WORKING FOR SCALES



REPLIGATOR

MVD Visuel

Back in the 1990s, producer/director Bret McCormick wanted to become the next Roger Corman and tried his hand at making low-budget horror and sci-fi movies for the kind of money you find in your couch. The result was just over a dozen films that you've probably never heard of, including the newly re-released *Repligator*. Billed as an erotic sci-fi/horror romp, it follows a group of scientists who have developed a matter transporter for the military. The only problem is that the transported soldiers become buxom bimbos who, after experiencing an orgasm, transform into ferocious alligator creatures. Not even cameos from sexy scream queen Brinke Stevens (*Cheerleader Massacre*) and original Leatherface Gunnar Hansen can save this sucker, which is rife with bad acting, bad sets and K-mart-quality costumes.

BODY COUNT: 2

MOST EMBARRASSING DEATH: Soldier's neck munched by a gator-babe

SERIAL APIST



SEXSQUATCH: THE LEGENO OF BLOOD STOOL CREEK

SRS Cinema

Just when I thought there was nothing more ludicrous than a snow shark or a gator-babe, I stumbled across *Sexsquatch: The Legend of Blood Stool Creek*! This isn't about the gentle, misunderstood giant that lurks in the forests of North America. Nope, this one's about Stinkfoot the Sexsquatch, a horny space alien who's come to our planet with the explicit intention of seeing how many people he can rape and murder, though not necessarily in that order. Mercifully clocking in at just under an hour, the film follows the fuzzy behemoth (a truly terrible costume) as he goes on a hilarious and gory killing spree at a teenage boy's de-virginizing party. Take it from me, you ain't seen nothing Yeti!

BODY COUNT: 9

MOST EMBARRASSING DEATH: Guy anally raped to death by the Sexsquatch

LAST CHANCE LANCE

SCRATCHING THE SKIN

ERRORS OF THE HUMAN BODY

Starring Michael Eklund, Karoline Herfurth and Tomas Lemarquis
Directed by Eron Sheean
Written by Eron Sheean and Shane Danielsen
IFC Midnight

The obsessive doctor or scientist who becomes too closely involved with his research and as a result triggers a medical mishap has been the subject of numerous genre flicks over the years. With the body horror-themed *Errors of the Human Body*, first-time feature film director Eron Sheean gives the concept a new twist.



The plot sees Canadian geneticist Dr. Geoffrey Burton (Michael Eklund, *The Call*) take on a position with a scientific institute in Dresden to assist his former intern, Rebekka Fiedler (Karoline Herfurth, *We Are the Night*), with research into rapid cellular regeneration, which may lead to a cure for cancer. However, when the emotionally tortured Burton – who is still grieving both the breakup of his marriage and the death of his infant son due to a previously unidentified disease – uncovers a plot by a rival researcher to use Rebekka's discoveries for his own unorthodox experiments, the scientist's intervention leads him to become infected with the same tumour-inducing disease (which he has named "Burton's Syndrome") that afflicted his son.

Filmed at the Max Planck Institute of Molecular Cell Biology and Genetics in Dresden (where Sheean had previously been an artist-in-residence), *Errors* benefits from its authentic laboratory setting. Also helping to ground the film in reality is the Australian director's decision to incorporate elements of some of the institute's research – such as tissue regeneration in organisms such as axolotls (Mexican salamanders) – into the film's script. Furthermore, the idea for Burton's rare affliction was partially based upon the existence of retroviruses – ancient, dormant viruses that are part of human DNA.

While the subject matter is certainly evocative of something David Cronenberg would have released at the beginning of his career, the film doesn't really go into the same blood-and-gore territory that the legendary director's early works explored. Though there is still some pretty disturbing imagery present, involving large, tumorous growths, mutating flesh and gaping wounds that spew out milky white liquid and squirming rodents, the film is less about the physical horrors on display and more about the emotional and psychological trauma its main character (with Eklund giving a riveting performance) endures. Recommended for fans of slow burn, art-house horror.

JAMES BURRELL

NEIL JORDAN RETURNS TO THE VAMPIRE SUBGENRE WITH A MOTHER-DAUGHTER TAKE ON THE MYTHOLOGY

BLOOD RELATIONS

BY LISA LADOUCEUR



HOW DO YOU TELL A STORY THAT CANNOT BE TOLD? ALTERNATELY, HOW DO YOU KEEP A SECRET FOR 200 YEARS?

This is the quandary of Eleanor, a teenage vampire, in *Byzantium*, the latest gothic horror tale from director Neil Jordan. The Irish filmmaker knows the undead territory well, having helmed 1994's adaptation of Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*. This time, it's not a fancy Brad Pitt/Tom Cruise Hollywood production but a modest $12 million picture that offers a more moody take on bloodsuckers, with new twists on old myths.

Eleanor (Saoirse Ronan, *Hanna*, pictured) will be sixteen forever. She is on the run from a secret Brotherhood with her "morbidly sexy" vampire mother Clara (Gemma Arterton, a Bond Girl from *Quantum of Solace* and the star of *The Disappearance of Alice Creed*). As the two land in a coastal holiday town during off-season and set up house in an empty hotel we learn of their opposing approaches to killing others for food: Clara punishes villains who prey on the weak while Eleanor seeks out the aged and others who are ready to die. The story is based on a stage play by Moira Buffini, and is as much about the dynamics of mother-daughter relationships as it is about monsters.

"I saw this movie as a kind of companion piece to *Interview* in a way. If Louis and Lestat were two women," says Jordan, in an interview after the film's premiere at last year's Toronto International Film Festival. "One is full of guilt and the other is without it. It's quite similar. I found the mother-daughter relationship fascinating. The fact that Eleanor was a teenager that would live forever with her mother: it would drive you nuts."

Byzantium also stars Caleb Landry Jones (*Antiviral*, *The Last Exorcism*) as Eleanor's first love, Frank. She longs to tell him her story, to unburden herself of her memories, and ultimately shares with him her secret diary entries. While he doesn't quite believe her, the awkward intimacy of their relationship is reminiscent of Eli and Oskar in *Let the Right One In*. In fact, this film as a whole will appeal to fans of that Swedish picture's combination of quiet atmosphere punctuated by brutal violence. *Byzantium*'s definitely not your average American teenage vampire movie.

Actually, it's not your average vampire movie, period. Apart from the "must be invited in" rule, Jordan threw away most of the characteristics we've come to associate with bloodsuckers. Sunlight is not a problem for them. There are no wooden stakes, holy water or bulbs of garlic to be found. Also: no fangs. Instead, Eleanor and Clara use talon-like fingernails to dig into the flesh of their victims.



"I just saw it as an opportunity to reinvent the whole thing, really," explains Jordan, who calls fake fangs "corny." "I never really find them terrifying or sexual. But the idea of this thumbnail that grows, like a strange erection, is more effective to me. And it kind of released these characters to be themselves in a way. I love the fact that they don't have superhuman powers. They don't fly. They just do one very simple thing – they kill to survive."

Despite the legacy of Shendan le Fanu's lesbian vampire story *Carmilla*, and the many cinematic adaptations of it over the years, notably 1970's Ingrid Pitt classic *The Vampire Lovers*, there haven't been many films from a female vampire viewpoint, particularly a feminist one. *Byzantium*'s Clara works as a stripper and prostitute for money as part of her ambition to "curb the power of men," which is what got her into the whole undead racket in the first place. Through a series of historical flashbacks we learn how she originally "stole" the gift of vampirism from an abuser.

"She's a kind of proto-feminist of the 18th century," says Jordan. One of the reasons Clara and Eleanor are being chased is that the "gift" was intended only for men; also, she dared to create another vampire – forbidden for woman. Even in a society of immortals, patriarchy rules.

Horror fans looking for jolts of gore will find it – including vicious decapitations and a glorious waterfall of blood – but the true allure of *Byzantium* is its poetic cinematography and meditations on how you choose to live your life, however long that life may be.

"Vampire movies should be full of sexuality and gore, it's part of their nature," says Jordan. "I don't think this movie will satisfy, you know, the kind of fans who want a gory moment every four seconds. It's not that kind of film. It's a horror movie, but it has got these more Gothic aspects to it. That's what I engage in. It's what attracted me to the whole thing."

REISSUES



WOLF IT DOWN

THE HOWLING (1981) Blu-ray

Starring Dee Wallace, Patrick Macnee and Robert Picardo
Directed by Joe Dante
Written by John Sayles and Terence H. Winkless
Scream Factory

Joe Dante – he of *Piranha*, *Gremlins* and *'Burbs* fame – is best known for his tongue-in-cheek genre comedies, but *The Howling* is considered his straight(est) horror film. Still, it takes an hour for FX wiz Rob Bottin's iconic werewolves to arrive, and until then Dante turns the genre-requisite fake scares into a cavalcade of self-reflective comedy. He mixes in footage of wolf cartoons and Lon Chaney Jr., teases viewers with fake howls and double entendres, and slips in cameos from the likes of Monster Kid idols Forrest J Ackerman and Dick Miller, before delivering a wolf-party climax that's well worth the wait.



There are any number of reasons to label *The Howling* – about a television newswoman (Dee Wallace) who survives a brush with a serial killer, only to wind up with a pack of werewolves at her heels – a classic, from the groundbreaking effects and John Sayles' clever screenplay (based on the novel by Gary Brandner), to the strong performances, perverted opening and satirical gut-punch of an ending. But anyway you slice it, *The Howling* simply has to be on the shelf of any self-respecting horror fan. Fortunately, that requirement just got a whole lot easier to meet with the release of Scream Factory's Blu-ray.

While the film was made on a shoestring budget of only $2 million, Dante knew how to make every penny count thanks to his time working for Roger Corman. The sickly sweet colour palette and careful camera moves have been marred by muddy transfers in the past, but they pop on Blu-ray like a genre flick with ten times the budget.

Even before you crack it open, it's clear that plenty of love went into this release, which sports a beautiful new cover by Nathan Thomas Milliner (Breathe easy, purists – Scream Factory has included the original poster art underneath.) In terms of extras, all of the features from the MGM DVD were ported over. Sadly, that's the only way to hear from Dante and the stars on the disc, but those features probably couldn't have been topped anyways. New extras include jovial interviews with co-writer Terence H. Winkless, editor Mark Goldblatt and producer Steven A. Lane, who dives into the troubled productions of the film's sequels with honesty and good humour.

This is now the definitive home video presentation of *The Howling*, and one that is sure to leave the movie's fans licking their chops.

PHIL BROWN

A CRAPPY HAND

THE DARK DEALER (1995) DVD

Starring Jeff English, Kevin Walker and Deborah Nunez
Written and directed by Tom Alexander and Wynn Winberg
MVD Visual

Framed by a sinister game of blackjack, this anthology finds three souls on the cusp of death playing for their lives. The wraparound concept for mid-'90s anthology *The Dark Dealer* is about as clever as it gets, though. The rest is full of strikingly silly effects, goofy acting and outlandish plots, which make it a perfect Friday night fright flick to take in with a few friends and a lot of beer.

The first segment revolves around a couple of street toughs who invade the dilapidated home of a strange elderly man. The criminals proceed to harass him for food and money, paying no heed to his objections and claims of "head sensitivities." Eventually the tables turn on the ne'er-do-wells in a demonic, *Evil Dead*-style way. By far the high point of the film, this tale sports some terribly terrific monster mayhem, featuring a mix of claymation and rubbery prosthetics.

The following installment is about a wannabe songwriter who happens upon the demo tape of an undiscovered blues man and reworks the songs as his own. All goes swimmingly for the rip-off artist, until the spirit of the dead songster demands payback. This sophomore slump is relatively light on horror but does treat the viewer to an awkward, synth-scored sex scene – pass me another brew.

The finale concerns a couple of troubled teens who pay off a drug debt by breaking into the corporate complex of a pharmaceutical company, allowing the hippie drug dealer to restock his supply. Things go south when the pusher pops an experimental pill and turns into a glowing mass of dirt, which soon transforms into a purplish ball of energy and chases after the young burglars. All of the magic here is done strictly by sub-*Lawnmower Man* computer animation that makes shows such as *Lexx* and *Babylon 5* seem like *Avatar* by comparison.



This DVD marks the movie's first North American release since it first came out on VHS and it shows, the 4:3 picture looks about as good as a new VHS transfer. The disc also includes a short making-of featurette on the second story – revealing how much work went into the production and also how much was overlooked in the scriptwriting phase – and trailers for two other craptastic-looking releases.

The Dark Dealer is abysmal. Still, with the right crowd, in the right mood, fans of horror cheese might just consider it a meretricious masterpiece. Beer me!

PATRICK DOLAN

NO SHOES, NO CLOTHES, NO PROBLEM

LIFEFORCE (1985) Blu-ray/DVD

Starring Steve Railsback, Peter Firth and Mathilda May
Directed by Tobe Hooper
Written by Dan O'Bannon, Don Jakoby and Colin Wilson
Scream Factory



Lifeforce: *Tobe Hooper's energy-sucking space vamps.*

Masters of Horror creator Mick Garris once remarked to me, "I think Mathilda May helped a lot of young boys reach maturity," and I'd be hard-pressed to disagree. And yet there's a whole lot more on offer in Tobe Hooper's barking-mad *Lifeforce*, one of those films that either swallows you whole or sends you running home to mommy – and I've got season tickets in Category A.



Based upon Colin Wilson's cult novel *Space Vampires*, *Lifeforce* kicks off with the spaceship *Churchill* on a mission to follow Halley's Comet. Our intrepid space jockeys are shocked to find the comet has a peculiar stowaway hiding in its trail, a 150-mile-long alien spacecraft. A landing party is dispatched to explore the seemingly derelict craft but soon (or too late) finds out that it's home to shapeshifting critters that suck the life essence out of unwary interlopers. Jaw-dropping space shenanigans ensue before a space shuttle arrives to haul the living and the living dead alike back to Earth, a well-intentioned mistake that sets a gorgeous, buck-naked space vampire (French-born ballet dancer Mathilda May) loose on the streets of London. And then shit gets real, albeit in a most unreal fashion.

For the uninitiated, it would be difficult to ask for a better introduction to *Lifeforce* than Scream Factory's new reissue, which features both the theatrical version and Hooper's longer, unrated cut. For the hardcore, it's packed to the tits with featurettes both new and old, audio commentary from Hooper, interviews and more. ("I thought, 'I'll go back to my roots and make a 70 millimetre Hammer film,'" the director reveals.)

Few genre film directors have experienced so many peaks and valleys as Hooper, and regardless of his next triumph or misstep, I will remain an ardent fan until they find me in that freezer next to Teri McMinn. *Lifeforce* is neither my pick for his best (*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* still rules the roost and likely always will) nor his worst (subjective, but I'd still go with *The Mangler*), but it may be his most completely and utterly twisted. Even in the Hooper oeuvre, this thing is in a category all its own. The kind you don't take home to mother. Super freaky.

JOHN W. BOWEN



THE

LATE-NITE ARCHIVE

FILE: A Familiar Ring

by Paul Corupe



"There's no tooling around with ghosts, because they take revenge!" warns narrator Boris Karloff in Mario Bava's *Black Sabbath* (1963), the acclaimed Italian director's fearful anthology that demonstrates how horror's sometimes highly moral messages can still be transgressive when they adapt to contemporary norms. With the classic film hitting Blu-ray this month courtesy of Kino, audiences will have a chance to revisit Bava's trio of terrible visions. The *Sorry, Wrong Number* update "The Telephone" is followed by "The Wurdalak," in which Karloff famously plays the patriarch of a family who returns home with a taste for blood, and is capped off with one of Bava's most memorably unsettling works, "The Drop of Water," in which an avenging phantom casts a ring thief into a disturbingly tactile personal hell.

Tales of wrongdoers getting their comeuppance may be some of the oldest horror stories around, but that doesn't mean they aren't effective. "The Drop of Water" draws on a tradition that goes back at least to medieval morality plays and folkloric figures such as Krampus and Black Pete, who punish misbehaving children. In more recent times, these nasty just desserts have been served in the twist conclusions of *Tales from the Crypt* comics and TV's *The Twilight Zone*. Even modern slasher figures such as Jason and Freddy are stark and bloody killers in the tradition of the nursery-rhyme antagonists in the classic German children's book *Struwwelpeter* and even the Devil himself – all imposing figures waiting to dole out painful punishments for those caught doing something immoral. There's a reason this well-worn story resonates: even though it's not as commonly accepted that innocents who enter into sin end up roasting in Hell these days, there's a good chance that audiences still believe in some kind of karmic retribution that keeps them on the straight and (mostly) narrow.



Cheekily credited to famous Russian playwright Anton Chekhov (who has nothing to do with the story), "The Drop of Water" takes place in Victorian England as Helen (Jacqueline Pierreux), a private nurse, is summoned to the home of an elderly medium who has just passed away, her face frozen into a grotesque scowl. While preparing the body for burial, Helen can't help but notice a large sapphire ring on the old lady's finger. After removing it and slipping it into her pocket, she's plagued by a series of nerve-jangling occurrences: she accidentally knocks over a glass of water, which drips loudly onto a metal plate, the body's hand slips off the bed and brushes her head, and a loudly buzzing fly won't leave her alone.

Upon nervously finishing her duties and escaping back to her flat, Helen's admiration of her newly acquired ring is interrupted by the return of many of the sights and sounds that haunted her at the old lady's deathbed. That persistently bothersome fly reappears, and when a storm causes the lights to go out, Helen is once again plagued by the sound of dripping water. Escaping to her bedroom, she's confronted by the corpse itself on her own bed, it rises and appears in her rocking chair. As Helen begs for mercy, the old woman's body glides toward the repentant nurse, grasping at her neck as the muscles slowly tighten.

The effectiveness of this type of familiar horror tale often depends on the depiction of the retribution itself, and Bava's leading of Helen through a disturbingly palpable descent into guilt and madness makes it essential viewing. The segment builds to an incredible climax; what begins as a series of small physical manifestations of the woman's guilt turn into her own personal hell. The director orchestrates a full-scale assault on her senses as punishment for her theft, the soundtrack amps up with thunderstorms, buzzing flies and dripping water, accompanied by visual flourishes such as flashes of bright lightning ripping through the darkness, pulsing green hues and, of course, the monstrously creepy face of the corpse, which was actually a wax mask created by Bava's father. But it's the sense of touch – which the viewing audience cannot share with Helen – that truly drives the nurse to her death, as she feels disembodied hands grabbing at her from around doorways and eventually around her neck.

Though *Black Sabbath*'s "The Drop of Water," doesn't specifically allude to fundamentalist beliefs that sinners will pay for their misdeeds in the afterlife, it doesn't need to. In the shifting morality of the 1960s, Helen's candy-coloured nightmare may not resemble fiery pits and an army of pitchfork-carrying demons, but it still manages to turn more modern signifiers into creepy reminders of our transgressions in a way that's not that far removed from biblical beliefs. Plus, if you're in need of being scared straight, then Bava's morality tale is probably a lot more fun, anyways.

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IT CAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT

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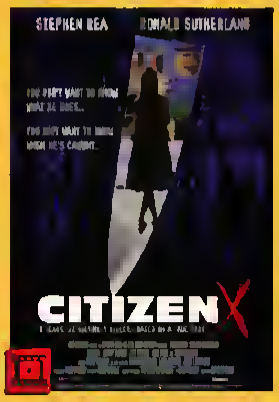
Just Say Nyet!

by John W. Bowen



Hey kids, remember the Soviet Union? Great honkin' huge place, colder than Canada, made up of Russia and a bunch of small countries that mostly ended in "-istan"? Got into a nuclear dick-measuring contest with the US that threatened global annihilation? Murdered more people than the Nazis? Rings a bell, then, does it? Okay, so apparently you weren't always asleep or stoned in history class. Well done, comrades. So why the pop quiz? Because all of the info above is integral to fully appreciating *Citizen X* (1995). A recent revisit cemented it as my pick for the most underrated fact-based serial killer film/police procedural thriller ever, and one in dire need of a proper reissue.

Between 1978 and the early '90s, Ukrainian-born Andrei Chikatilo killed more than 50 people – the vast majority teens and children – in and around the southern Russian city of Rostov. Arrested in 1992, he confessed to 56 of the gruesome sex murders, was tried for 53, convicted and sentenced to death for 52 and eventually executed (just once) on Valentine's Day in '94. *Citizen X* chronicles Chikatilo's epic killing spree – sometimes in grisly detail, sometimes simply by implication – but its real villain is the dogma-bound, bureaucratic Soviet system that undermines the investigation of the case even as the body count continues to soar, since acknowledging the existence of a serial killer in their country is considered treason. ("Zerial murder eez a decadent Vestern venomenon.") With heads firmly entrenched in sand/snowbanks/asses, authorities blame the murders on "gangs" and round up local homosexuals in mass arrests (For some Canadian readers, this may trigger memories of Project Guardian, a police operation in Ontario back in the '90s allegedly targeting a child porn ring but ultimately just a thinly veiled excuse to arrest and harass a bunch of gay men. Results? Oopsy! Not one single child porn charge was laid and it was a public relations disaster for the cops.)



Stephen Rea (*The Company of Wolves*, *The Butcher Boy*, *Stuck*) plays Lieutenant Viktor Burakov, a beleaguered forensic examiner put in charge of the investigation who soon realizes that the Soviet regime only wants him as a combination figurehead and scapegoat in a case they don't really want conclusively solved. Jeffrey DeMunn (*The Hitcher*, *The Blob*) turns in a career-high performance as Chikatilo, a browbeaten milquetoast functionary who takes full advantage of his outward blandness to hide in plain sight, as have so many of his Western counterparts – think Gary Ridgway, Dennis Rader and Robert Pickton. Donald Sutherland won both an Emmy and a Golden Globe for his turn as Colonel Fetisov, who initially appears as part of the Soviet bureaucracy determined to crush Burakov's efforts but soon turns out to be his most important ally.

The cast is a little slice of character actor heaven. Rea, DeMunn and Sutherland are joined by Joss Ackland (*Rasputin the Mad Monk*, *The House That Dripped Blood*) as a communist party twat and Max Von Sydow – that's right, Max Von Muthafuckin' Sydow – as a forensic psychiatrist who arrives in the third act to save the day. It's all directed with tremendous assurance by Chris Gerolmo, who first garnered acclaim for scripting Alan Parker's *Mississippi Burning* (1988).

It's also worth noting that 2004's fair-to-middlin' *Evilenko* (which I reviewed back in *RM#56*) tells the same story and sports an impressive performance by Malcolm McDowell in the killer role, but if you see only one film about Andrei Romanovich Chikatilo – a.k.a. the Butcher of Rostov – this year, *Citizen X* is the one you want.

HBO released a DVD in 2000 on its own imprint, the transfer looks and sounds great, but fans would surely gobble up a Blu-ray with a few extras tossed in, especially since most of the principal players on both sides of the camera remain alive and well as of press time. Now get the hell out of my basement and fetch me some more vodka and pickled herring.

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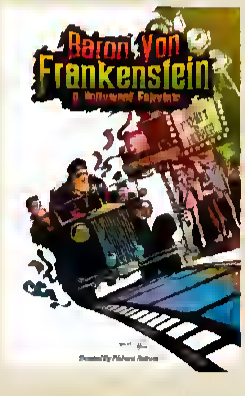
BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

BY PEDRO CABEZUELO

There have been many interpretations of Dracula, Frankenstein, the Wolf Man and other iconic monsters over the years, but none have had more staying power in our collective consciousness than those by Universal Pictures. The studio's classic designs continue to permeate pop culture despite the number of more modern and more "serious" re-imaginings.

And yet there's no denying that some consider those versions relics of a bygone era when horror was less threatening and not quite as "legitimate" as contemporary offerings. This view, however misguided, is the starting point for the new digital graphic novel *Baron Von Frankenstein: A Hollywood Fairytale* (available now from Viper Comics), a fun and heartwarming love letter to the mad monsters of yore.

In the book, the Baron, his monster, and servant Igor not only exist in the real world, they have also played themselves in a series of Hollywood films for decades. Unfortunately, their movies are losing favour with the younger generation, which prefers sparkling vampires and over-the-top CGI horrorfests. But along comes David S. Sippiro, a hotshot talent agency executive, who presents the monsters (including Dracula, the Wolf Man, the Mummy, the Invisible Man, the Cyclops and Jekyll/Hyde) with a tempting offer: hand over their likenesses to be used in a series of market-driven advertising campaigns.



Not wishing to be a spokesman for deodorant, hair remover or insurance, the Baron refuses – and promptly vanishes. Igor and the Monster set out to solve the mystery of his disappearance and in the process uncover a more sinister plot.

With its many satirical jabs at the film industry, it's not surprising to learn that the story originated as a screenplay by Richard Rothstein and Stanley Resnicoff. When that project failed to materialize, the idea was picked up by Viper Comics, which turned to writer Michael Moreci to adapt *Baron Von Frankenstein*.

"I had worked on a few other projects with Viper and formed a relationship with president Jesse Garza," says Moreci. "He knew my affinity for classic horror, so when this opportunity came up, he passed it along to me. I'm thrilled he did, it was a blast working on [it]."

Moreci is no stranger to writing comics that blend horror and show business: he's the writer and creator of Image's awesome *Hoax Hunters*, which features a number of urban legends and spooky myths. *Baron*, however, offered him the opportunity to work with more classic and beloved horror archetypes – a slight, but welcome, deviation.

"I love classic monsters," admits Moreci. "And the idea of placing them in a contemporary setting as these washed-up Hollywood denizens was too good to pass up. It has the awesome blend of horror and mystery and comedy that I think is so fantastic."

Artist Keith Burns is definitely a large part of the book's success. Although highly influenced by the monsters' classic look, he puts his own spin on many of the characters. At the same time, he also borrows from other horror eras. His Igor bears a striking resemblance to Marty Feldman from *Young Frankenstein*, while the Monster's varsity jacket and cap and dragster car owe more to the 1960s than the 1930s.

It's a vibrant, colourful interpretation and a visual treat for long-time horror fans that never descends into parody.

"Keith is one of my favourite artists, and his work on this book is incredible," Moreci enthuses. "His storytelling is super crisp, his characters rich, and he has a great sense of visual humour – he can go from light to dark in no time. His work brings the book to life, start to finish."



Baron Von Frankenstein: A Hollywood Fairytale *A fresh, satirical take on horror's favourite classic monsters*

Despite the fun tone, however, it's difficult not to be somewhat sad at the prospect that some modern fans casually dismiss such iconic characters. For many of us, though – Moreci included – the classics will always hold a special place in our hearts.

"The classics, man, they were scary in smarter ways, and they did so much more with so much less. Plus, this is the foundation of horror we're talking about! Dracula, Wolf Man, Invisible Man ... It's impossible to pass up a chance to actually write Dracula."

FOLLOW PEDRO ON TWITTER @PCABEZUELO

QUICK CUTS

REVIEWS BY PEDRO CABEZUELO



Classic pulp hero The Shadow tinkered with the supernatural in the past and, like many pulp characters, often dabbled with the horrific and macabre. However, the story arc beginning in *The Shadow* #13 is the first since this title's launch to fully embrace the genre. A ghostly serial killer calling herself "The Light" is prancing through New York brutally murdering seemingly random targets. Dressed in flowing white robes, this phantom lady aims to cleanse the city of sin and corruption – unless The Shadow stops her first. It remains to be seen if The Light is in fact an agent of the spirit world or more akin to a *Scooby Doo* villain, in this title either is possible. In the meantime, there's good scripting and plenty of gore and brutality on display to satiate horror fans while we await the answer.

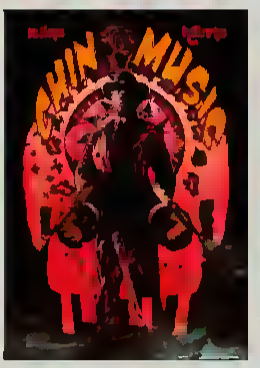
When two-bit hood Wes Podell finds a rotting corpse sitting in his hotel room, a chain of events is set in motion that leads to more bodies, an invalid millionaire, gruesome experiments and, of course, a justice-seeking Lobster Johnson. Dark Horse's one-shots consistently prove it is possible to tell a satisfying, action-packed story in a single issue. *Lobster Johnson: Satan Smells a Rat* is a solid horror mystery that unravels at a good pace, and the tight script is fleshed out with some great art by Kevin Nowlan who lends the proceedings the right amount of horror imagery.



Winslow is an inmate in a mental institution who prefers the comfort and control of dreams to the real world. One night he's physically attacked by wraith-like hooded figures from his dreams who will stop at nothing – including murder – to capture him. With the help of Anne, an employee at the hospital, Winslow escapes. Pursued throughout the city, the couple encounters yet another hooded figure, the Merchant of Dreams, who offers some much-needed answers. The exploration of dreams versus reality is a familiar trope in horror and *The Dream Merchant* treads some much-mined territory. Still, writer Nathan Edmondson has sprinkled in enough elements to hint that all may not be what it appears to be. Add to this a likeable protagonist and nice art by Konstantin Novosadov and it's enough to keep one anticipating how the tale will play out.

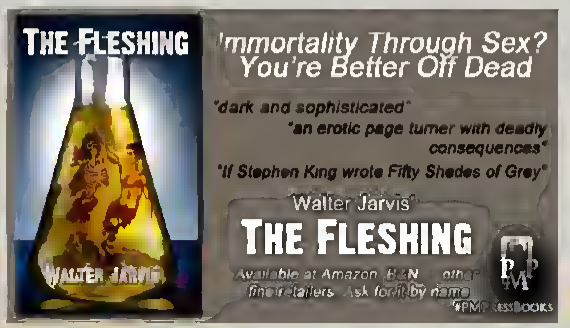


What do gangsters, an Egyptian fortune teller, flesh-stripping demons, a living skeleton and Al Capone have in common? Hell if I know, but they can all be found in the pages of *Chin Music*, the latest series from the warped mind of Steve Niles. Joining him is artist Tony Harris, an ideal choice to distract the reader from the fact that there are more questions than answers in this opening installment. Pages are filled with haunting and bloody images that make a far stronger impact than the writing. That's not necessarily a complaint, but many will undoubtedly be scratching their heads after the first read, trying to put all the gory pieces together. It's a matter of style first, substance later. But when the style is this well done, I can wait.



Most horror lit fans know that "The Fall of the House of Usher" is one of Poe's most famous and most adapted tales. As a result, rather than do a straight re-imagining, Richard Corben has decided to mix in some elements from another Poe story, "The Oval Portrait," to spice things up. (I'll leave it to the Poe enthusiasts to determine exactly which ones.) The basic narrative, however, is still the same: a young gentleman named Allan pays a visit to his old friend Roderick Usher at his family estate, only to find strange goings-on between Usher and his sister. Of course, the main draw of the book is Corben's exquisite art style, and in this respect he does not disappoint. He draws the house as if it were a corpse, slowly decaying and falling apart. It's a beautifully ghoulish setting, filled with plenty of details and enough bizarre characters that even the most hardcore Poe fan will be willing to ignore the narrative transgressions.







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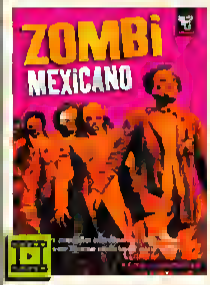
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Keith J. Rainville
From Parts Unknown Publications

How nice it is to be provided a window into a secret world of cinema. In this case, the world of the Mexican zombie films of the '70s. But why has this movement been obscured, especially with the stacks of zombie-related books out there? How did it escape the gaze of the obsessive completists? This is exactly what author/lowbrow culture junkie Keith J. Rainville seeks to answer.

Rainville starts by taking the reader through the semantic discrepancies that he thinks are at the root of all the confusion – the idea that what Mexican cinemagoers call mummies, the rest of us might call zombies. This mislabelling seems in part due to the real-life mummies of Guanajuato, a hundred-or-so well-preserved corpses found in the city's San Sebastian cemetery that have since gone on to be displayed for public eyes (see *RM#42*).

Add to that the nation's fervent worship of *luchadores enmascarados* (masked wrestlers) and the template laid down by the highly popular Universal Monsters cycle of movies, then stir in one rather savvy film producer (Rogelio Agrasanchez), and the Mexican zombie film is born.



Rainville, an expert on masked wrestlers, outlines seven key titles that fit the bill, from *Las Momias de Guanajuato* (1970) to *Mansion de le Siete Momias* (1975), and further references other films that hover around this particular universe, but are perhaps less essential (or less palatable) by beginners' standards.

Opening every chapter is a fifteen-plate gallery of stills from the titles, and it's here that things really get interesting. Considering their vintage, these films (or more specifically the designs of the undead) appear to be a decade ahead of their time, as zombie makeups didn't look nearly this crusty until Lucio Fulci's *Zombie* unleashed its clay-faced monstrosities in 1979. The visual feast continues with several posters and lobby cards done in the colourful and highly explosive Mexican style.

Better still, Rainville's excited and accessible writing makes you want to head straight to YouTube for references. If you like zombies, cinematic crypto-movements or wrestling, this book is top-rope – er, top-shelf – stuff.

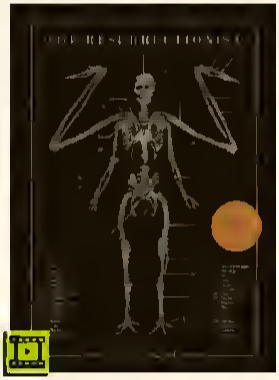
Viva los Muertos!

TAL ZIMERMAN

THE RESURRECTIONIST

E.B. Hudspeth
Quirk

If you cast your eyes over last month's Library of the Damned column, you may recall me writing of the strange soft spot I have for alternative histories and accounts of worlds that could be ours, were it not for subtle supernatural influences or slightly mad science. If your interests lie in similar territory, allow me to point you towards *The Resurrectionist*.



This beautiful oversized hardcover is very much two books in one, which combine to tell a single (mostly) complete story about the life and work of the fictional – though presented here as real – Dr. Spencer Black. Still with me? The first half of the book serves as Black's biography, tracing his childhood roots in mid-19th-century America through to his first steps through the doors of medical school, where his interest in insect biology and human birth defects (notably conjoined twins) really flourished. But as Black's early fascinations devolve into obsession, the doctor's genius takes a decidedly darker turn, which ultimately sees Black disgraced amongst his peers, as his experiments become ever more bizarre and unpalatable (including his attempts at growing tissue to graft together living creatures in a shed behind his home).

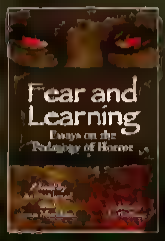
The latter half of the volume is dedicated almost exclusively to highly detailed medical textbook-esque sketches of various mythological and chimera-type beasts. (Ever wonder what a man might look like with an elephant's cranium and trunk? The answers are revealed within.) Each image contains a detailed key – utilizing actual medical terminology – of the creation in question, and some even contain short essays, further

THE GRIM READER

FEAR AND LEARNING:
ESSAYS ON THE PEDAGOGY OF HORROR

Aalya Ahmad and Sean Moreland, eds.
McFarland

The topics in this collection of essays – focused on teaching horror in universities – range from the ways in which the *Evil Dead* franchise can be used to explain concepts of postmodernism, to the study of *Frankenstein* as a tool for examining issues surrounding the adaptation of texts into other media. That said, this book has such a specialized focus that it's unlikely to appeal to anyone who isn't actively teaching a genre course.



JUSTINE WARWICK

PRAY LIED EVE:
THREE TALES OF THE UNTOWARD

Lydia Peever
Createspace

Lydia Peever's novella-sized anthology of horror offers up yarns about a haunted basement, ice balls falling from the sky, and demonic animals that talk. Each story starts strong by building sinister ambience, only to finish abruptly, with endings that don't always add up. The first two tales are rather blasé and don't quite deliver the scares, while the final one proves to be the strongest and most compelling. Starting and ending there would be best.



VANESSA FURTADO



Harpy Erinyes fetal development from ***The Resurrectionist***

linking them with Black's research.

If you've got a penchant for weird stories and even weirder fantastical faux science, then this is a book screaming for your coffee table. If this review doesn't sell it, just imagine the confused looks *The Resurrectionist* will garner from your slightly drunken friends as they try to determine if there's any veracity to this account of mad, mad medical fiction.

MONICA S. KUEBLER

DREAMS OF FEAR:
POEMS OF TERROR AND THE SUPERNATURAL

S.T. Joshi and Steven J. Mariconda, eds.
Hippocampus Press

"Just as all fiction first found extensive embodiment in poetry," wrote H.P. Lovecraft, "so is it in poetry that we first encounter the permanent entry of the weird into standard literature." As if seeking to serve as quantifiable evidence for this statement, this 350-page anthology contains the very best poetic writings dealing with sweet terror.

There are no gloomy reflections on the inevitability of death or laments over dead beloved here – unless they come back from the grave. In fact, the editors themselves specify that "the focus has been on verse that actually depicts supernatural phenomena, instances of non-supernatural terror have been generally excluded." Brief biographical and critical notes on the poets have been added to help contextualize their work. And other than a couple in German and French, one in Belgian and some ancient Greek and Roman works, the vast majority of the pieces in this collection were originally written in English.



HOW FAR WOULD YOU GO TO SAVE YOUR FAMILY?

RONALD MALFI MINES THE HORRORS OF PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR CRADLE LAKE

TROUBLED WATERS

By W. BRICE MCVICAR

Of all the roles and responsibilities one can take on in one's lifetime none may be more frightening or more fraught with basic terror than parenthood. As such, being tasked with the health and welfare of another living person is fertile ground for horror, especially if you're Ronald Malfi, whose latest novel, *Cradle Lake*, began in the womb.

"I wrote the first draft when my wife was pregnant," says the Maryland-based author. "I started thinking about all the horrible things that could happen, and that's sort of where the idea for the book came from. You know, as a father and a burgeoning parent, how far do you take trying to protect your family? To the point where you're actually hurting them? That's really what the crux of the novel is."

Set in North Carolina, *Cradle Lake* (out now from Medallion Press) is the story of Alan Hummerstun and his wife, Heather. The couple – who have suffered two miscarriages – inherits Alan's uncle's house and decide to leave New York for a new beginning. With Heather heavily medicated and suffering from deep depression, the marriage is slowly dissolving, leaving Alan a broken man trying to fix things out of his control. Following a car accident involving a local boy, Alan learns that the titular body of water in the thick woods behind their new home has healing powers – something the Cherokee Indians, who once called the lands home, unsuccessfully tried to keep secret. Despite warnings from area residents and a Native American elder, Alan takes advantage of Cradle Lake, only to learn that for all things given, there are also things extracted.



Malfi's eleventh novel continues the award-winning author's tradition of building strong characters and then placing them in situations that test them both morally and physically.

"I think it's important to recognize there are no good people and there are no evil people, and there's no godliness. There's just what there is," he explains. "Your evil character shouldn't be completely evil and your good characters aren't completely good, they're just people. I think that's more in line with reality than to simply say, 'Here is Darth Vader dressed in black with his cape and here's my Luke Skywalker dressed in white and he's all good.' To me, that just rings a little bit untrue."

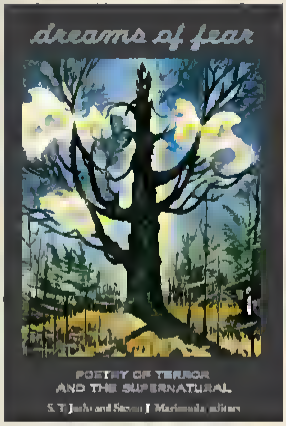
For example, in the tale, Alan is continuously – without his wife's knowledge – drawn to the titular waters by a misguided desire to improve his family's situation and Heather's mental health, which forces him to become an outsider in his new community while the town's sheriff and well-intentioned next-door neighbours continue to do their best to protect him. He also digs into local history and learns of another man's similar choices and the insanity and murder that ensued as the lake's waters made his wife a younger woman whom he couldn't keep up with or satisfy. Despite a multitude of warnings, Alan is doomed to make a similar mistake.

Once Malfi's done establishing his characters, he often cuts them off from others – whether it be physical isolation or emotional – as a reflection of his own fears. While Malfi also teases readers by hinting that a giant beast may or may not reside in the woods surrounding the lake, he leaves no doubt that the true monster is Alan's inability to recognize his self-destructive behaviour, and the resulting isolation.

"Overall, those are the kinds of things that frighten me," he allows, "to have no one there, to have no one to talk to, to have no one to rely on, no one to just witness. For me, I find those more frightening than dealing with outside entities."

Medallion is already gearing up to follow up *Cradle Lake* with Malfi's *December Park* next March. Malfi describes it as his "most personal" work yet.

"It's a coming of age novel, it's a thriller/horror novel, and it focuses on what it was like growing up out here in the mid-Atlantic region [in the mid-'90s]," he says. "It's hard to say where I see myself going in the future because I've left that door open to just whatever story pleases me and interests me at that point. I'll always be interested in characters and their motivations and where they come from over whole chapters filled with gore."



The contents include creepy poems or excerpts from classical literature and the European Renaissance (Homer, Dante, Marlowe, Milton), lyrics from famous poets not usually associated with the weird (Goethe, Blake, Victor Hugo, Yeats, Frost) and numerous works from horror writers better known for their fiction (M.G. Lewis, Bierce, Maupassant, Dunsany, Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard). Of course, Edgar Allan Poe's presence is inevitable, with five poems selected (though not "The Raven"). He is in the company of his followers, such as Charles Baudelaire, and predecessors, including Coleridge, whose "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" the editors consider "the greatest weird poem ever written." In their introduction they also laurel Clark Ashton Smith as "the greatest weird poet in all literature."

Sadly, some important works had to be omitted due to their length (Coleridge's "Christabel," Keats' "Lamia" and the exquisite "The City of Dreadful Night" by James Thomson, among them). And if we are to include contemporary scribes, the absence of Thomas Ligotti's bleak lyrics is quite inexplicable.

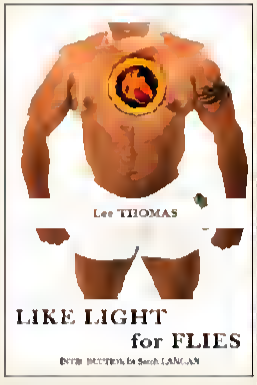
Still, the wealth of poems contained within these covers is enough to make *Dreams of Fear* the most comprehensive and thoughtfully selected anthology of spooky poetry ever attempted. Even those lovers of horror who otherwise may not be inclined towards poetry will find this book indispensable for the sheer variety and beauty of the evocative images and resonant phrases, which embody Lovecraft's ideal of "that crystalline essence of artistic fear which belongs to the domain of poetry."

OEJAN OGNJANOVIC

LIKE LIGHT FOR FLIES

Lee Thomas
Lethe Press

Bram Stoker and Lambda Literary Award-winning author Lee Thomas is back with a gripping slew of atmospheric, bone-chilling shorts in *Like Light for Flies*. While horror fans will find familiar storylines within this twelve-story collection (its subgenres range from supernatural dark crime to psychological horror), the author's skillful handling of the narratives gives each of them, regardless of subject matter, a fresh and modern feel.



The tales examine human nature in its darkest moments, invoking a squeam-inducing dread that lasts long after the final pages have been turned. During the midst of a zombie outbreak in the flash (a.k.a. very short) fiction piece "Tuesday," the survivors are more focused on which of them will have to be sacrificed for dinner than the swarming horde that roams outside; in "Fine in the Fire," Thomas examines the horrors of DIY electroshock therapy when a man attempts to "cure" his son of his homosexuality, and in "Flicker" he explores addiction, as a girl proves she will do anything for a fix, even if it means agreeing to star in a film without first seeing what kind of movie it is. Without giving away any spoilers, know that these tales tend to end very badly for their protagonists.

Thomas constructs concrete, lifelike characters that he casts into a descriptively dark world. While Sylvia, who is the driving force in "Comfortable in Her Skin," might not be the most morally admirable protagonist, using and robbing men for their money, he forces the reader to empathise with her by bringing them right into her world and making her actions believable and intriguing.

A truly terrifying and uncomfortable read, Thomas doesn't shy away from gore, violence or brutal imagery. More than that, however, *Like Light for Flies* is worth checking out for its thought-provoking and uninhibited look at some of the worst qualities of the human condition. Not for the faint of heart – or the optimistic.

JESSA SOBCZUK

LIBRARY OF THE DAMNED

STORYNEXUS & BLACK CROWN

"Why do you read?"

There are many answers to this – yours probably won't match mine – but I read, watch movies, play video games and write fiction, because for me stories have always been the ultimate escape. A well-told tale's greatest power, regardless of medium, is that it can pull you out of your own reality and place you squarely inside of its world.

Before video games took interactive storytelling to a new level (with gameplay that evolved based on player decisions, moral and otherwise), this concept was being toyed with in the '80s via those popular *Choose Your Own Adventure* books. I used to read those things again and again just so I could experience every narrative possibility.

So it was exciting to discover storynexus.com, a website/fiction platform promoting a similar kind of interactive, branching storytelling. Here, those *CYoA*-style decisions are combined with some RPG-esque elements to literally invite you to star in a story as it unfolds around you. One of the best examples of this is *Black Crown* (blackcrownproject.com), an utterly demented outing by 23-year-old Rob Sherman, sponsored by Random House.

The tale, during which you choose your own actions and destinations (provided you've collected the necessary materials, which is done by navigating through subplots), is an experimental work of absurdist sci-fi horror. An atmospheric, dense and surprisingly challenging read, *Black Crown* is recommended to those who prefer their literature really, *really* weird.

You awaken as a "clerk," with a mysterious exo-body called "a dutch frame" joined to your own and are soon sent to your "quarren" to push file folders across your desk, like the other hundreds of drones on the hillside around you who have been recruited to work on the secretive Black Crown Project. Depending on which files you open, which places you explore when you leave your desk, which characters you interact with and the actions you commit while doing those things, you begin to open the wider world of the story (which is expanded and updated regularly). It's a place full of disease, where pain is a constant (and constantly measured, and can restrict your narrative choices), animals talk and feed you tainted soup(!), and there may never be any straight or easy answers. Its world continues to unfold as I write this.

If this sounds too strange for you, storynexus.com hosts other user-created, interactive horror stories (though as of this writing, none are complete). *What Lies Around the Corner*, for example, drops you in the town of Black Hollow to collect souls and outrun the monsters that hunt at midnight, while attempting to solve a much larger mystery, and *This Rising Darkness*, a well-structured survival-horror siege tale, does a stellar job of writing you into the evolving action and withholding the true nature of the menace. Unlike *Black Crown* both utilize a random deck of "story cards" (events) to help advance your character and the plot.

But perhaps the most exhilarating part of storynexus.com, for me anyway, is that anyone can create an account and try their hand at crafting an interactive tale. Count me in!

MONICA S. KUEBLER

THE FRIGHT GALLERY

CURATED BY GARY PULLIN

THIS MONTH: HIS NAME IS JASON

Jason Edmiston is no stranger to these pages. We've featured his paintings in several features and he was the man behind the drool-inducing cover art for Cronenberg's *The Fly* retrospective (*RM#116*). His style is equal parts Basil Gogos and Drew Struzan, with a helping of lowbrow pop artist Ron English – and with an upcoming solo show at Austin's Mondo Gallery in August, his popularity will continue to grow. Titled A Rogues Gallery, the show runs August 23 to September 14 and will feature stunning new paintings and screen prints celebrating horror cinema's baddest villains and monsters. From the aliens in *They Live* to the creatures created by Ray Harryhausen, Edmiston's latest exhibit is the ultimate tribute to the nightmarish monsters, anti-heroes and maniacs he grew up watching.

"I'm drawn towards slashers and unstoppable killing machines," he explains. "Maybe it's my ego that makes me fantasize about crazed monsters that will never rest until they destroy me."

A late-night viewing of *Friday the 13th* at an impressionable young age left a machete-sized mark on the artist's imagination and soon he was hooked on the golden era of '80s horror, sci-fi and the spectacular posters that marketed films during that era.

"They were thrilling, and scary, and I couldn't stop talking about [them] the next day. Sharing my name with the bad guy didn't hurt my fascination either. As far as the art for horror films goes, I [have been] interested in loud, exciting paintings my entire life, and what's more exciting than horror art?"

He channelled that inspiration into a monster-making career and, unlike some artists, doesn't shy away from revealing his tricks of the trade. This issue, he gives us an exclusive look into the process behind one of his paintings for the upcoming Mondo show, a tribute to exploitation star and one bat motherfucker, William Marshall as Blacula!

"I was thinking about my favourite movie villains and monsters, and some that hadn't been given a proper portrait. Blacula came to mind, but I wanted him to be treated with respect. The movie may seem silly, but actor William Marshall didn't play him with anything but seriousness, and my portrait should do the same."

Starting out among piles of found reference, Edmiston creates quick thumbnails until a tighter pencil sketch is developed. This is where logistical elements such as the actor's likeness, and the light and shadow are worked out.

"With my pencil rough for Blacula, I knew I wanted a straightforward head and shoulders portrait, so the cropping is pretty tight. I thought that it might be interesting to show Blacula's hand pointing towards the viewer, a la Bela Lugosi, but decided that it took the focus away from his face. I decided in the end to reference another well-known portrayer of Dracula, Christopher Lee, by adding a trickle of blood down his mouth."

Moving onto the underpainting, Edmiston states the importance of this stage.

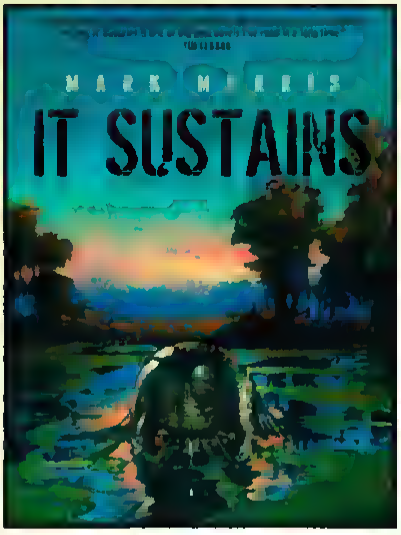
"The most important piece of advice I could lend regarding traditional painting, is to build upon a strong foundation. By this, I mean that before jumping into the fun painting stage, it's best to start with a fully realized drawing with the light and shadows worked out. This will avoid problems along the way, because the forms and volumes are already established, and the painting stage is merely colouring. This is a well-established old masters technique that unifies all the colours, and provides a warm glow throughout the piece."

Next issue, we'll have a few more step-by-step pictures, more insider advice from Edmiston, plus the final reveal of Blacula!





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THE GORE MET

MENU: TESTING THE GAG REFLEX

Back in *RM#110*, I waxed enthusiastically about *Brutal Relax* (2010), a hilariously gory fifteen-minute short by Spaniards Adrián Cardona, Rafa Oangrá and David Muñoz, about a high-strung man whose day at the beach is ruined by a horde of aquatic zombies. Check it out on YouTube before you read on, I'll wait.

Funny, eh?! Also on YouTube is a more recent collaboration between Cardona and Muñoz, *Fist of Jesus* (2012), another fifteen-minute short in the same splatstick vein, which they hope to develop into a feature. Blasphemy has never been so funny!

The plot: while delivering a sermon on a mount, Jesus is interrupted by Jacob, whose son Lazarus has died. In an arrogant display of divinity, Jesus resurrects Lazarus, who comes back as a flesh-eating zombie! Jesus promptly tries to flee with Judas in tow, but soon must face and lay waste – using various species of fish! – to hordes of Pharisean, Romen and cowboy(!) roffars.

A three-minute sequence serves as a set-up to an unrelenting barrage of goofy gleeful gore effects that skillfully combine practical makeup with digital trickery. Cardona and Muñoz pick up right where Peter Jackson left off with the lawnmower gag in *Dead Alive* (1992).

Speaking of gag, there's a universal human experience that begins with a slow churning in the pit of your stomach. Then an ominous tickle starts in the back of your throat. You salivate, but can't swallow. You break out in a cold sweat and are overcome by lightheadedness. You stagger for the nearest receptacle and hope to make it there before the contents of your upper digestive tract are forcibly expulsed in a stinking, slimy liquid mass. You're gonna hurl!



This brings us to the excess of vomit in the recently released *Bad Meat* (2011, available from MVD Visual). A sextet of teens, whose transgressions against society range from arson to expressing homosexual desires to dressing in black, are sent to Camp Hardway, a dystopian boot camp for troubled youth lorded over by a Nazi-worshipping administrator and his trio of sadistic warders (hey, this is a low-budget flick.)

The tone of life in the camp is set on the first day, when one of the campers is awakened by a stream of piss from one of the guards. A day of chopping firewood ends with a meal of a raw potato, while the staff dines on a meaty stew prepared by the perpetually abused camp cook. The stew meat is rotten, though, served up as a final act of revenge by the chef, who drives off in the camp jeep while the guards engage in kinky sex and the commandant bones up on Nazi history. Spew ensues.

The following morning, the teens wake up to find their tormentors almost lifeless in their ludicrously puke-drenched quarters. They're not dead though, they've been devolved by the infected meat into cannibalistic maniacs. Cue typical zombie film hijinks.

Except that this isn't a typical zombie film, or even quite a film per se. *Wrong Turn* (2003) director Rob Schmidt reportedly shot two-thirds of it in Winnipeg in 2008 before the production company ran out of money and filming was halted. In the years since, several members of the cast rose to prominence in feature films and television shows (Mark Pellegrino in *Supernatural* and *Being Human*; Dave Franco in *Warm Bodies* and *Fright Night*), so the existing footage was dusted off to try to capitalize on that. New segments involving a lone survivor in a hospital bed swathed head to toe in bandages was boneheadedly added to flesh out the run time and create something resembling continuity. Alas, it's still incomplete, rife with massive plot holes, before it painfully screeches to an abrupt and wholly unsatisfying ending.


Mark Pellegrino, as the Nazi-worshipping administrator

Even so, it's readily apparent that this would have been a minor but entertaining gross-out had it been made properly. While the characters are little more than archetypes, the cast is especially convincing. Moments of black humour and genuine tension are expertly balanced. The gore effects are impressive, particularly a dead dog autopsy and a meat-hook hanging, but it's over as soon as a penis is ripped off and eaten. It's painfully obvious that gore effects inserts are missing, let alone other bits that would have better advanced the story.

This missed opportunity is credited to "Lulu Jarmen," an appellation that shnaks pseudonym. The sole extra is a trailer tacked onto the end of the film that doesn't even merit a separate track. Of course, that would have entailed creating a menu for the disc.

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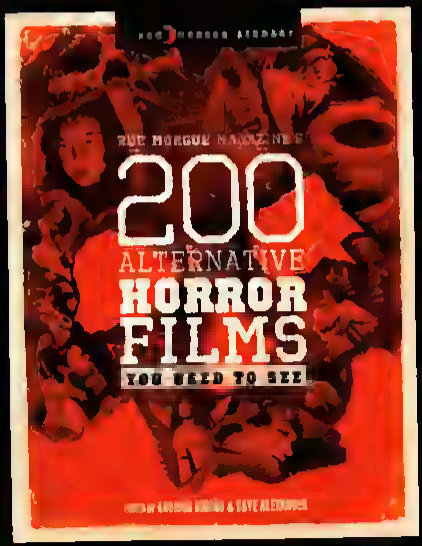
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DEADLY · SINISTER · DECENT · DULL · DRIVEL · DOA DEAD ON ARRIVAL

REVIEWS BY THE GORE-MET MARK R. HASAN, KIEL HUME, ALEX KENNEDY, AARON VON LUPTON AND GEORGE PACHECO



ANTIVIRAL

SOUNDTRACK

E.C. Woodley

LAKESHORE RECORDS

It takes a little while to settle into the slow-burning groove of E.C. Woodley's score for Brandon Cronenberg's *Antiviral*, but it ultimately makes for an engaging immersion into the young Canadian's own brand of surreal horror. Essentially built around four alternating notes, initially heard on soft keyboard, Woodley quickly strips down his quartet of resonating tonalities into saturated bass chords, and gradually layers in fuzzy pulses and synth drones, with an intermittent cello that's been enhanced to sound neither organic nor synthetic. The score's most affecting quality is the way the tones and soft textures seem to breathe, and no matter how much the electronic elements may distort, they're all kept in a range that's weirdly soothing. Not unlike the work of Clint Mansell (*Solaris*), there's a dreamy quality to the whole creation, with no sharp edges or dynamic shocks, and while ostensibly a work of electronic minimalism, the score offers a fair amount of emotional scope. MRH ★★★★



WILLARD (2003)

SOUNDTRACK

Shirley Walker

LA-LA LAND RECORDS

One of the last horror scores written by the great Shirley Walker, *Willard*'s soundtrack has managed to outlive the 2003 film largely because of the classy way she crafted an almost loving homage to Bernard Herrmann (with just a slight nod or two to former mentor Danny Elfman). Like her masterpiece, *Final Destination*, Walker's theme is built around a few notes, but it's the colours and beautiful orchestrations that really stand out: low woodwinds, trilling ascending chords, tittering and jaunty flutes ("The Tire Mission"), mocking accordions, and a menacing motif that persistently drifts in and out like a sonic seesaw of gloom and doom. The score's mood is occasionally buoyed by gentle theme variations, but no matter how grim a scenario, Walker's strategic plotting delivers the dramatic goods, and lets audiences laugh with her as the dread and inevitable carnage reach their ridiculous proportions. MRH ★★★★



HARLEY POE

FOLK

Man of God

CHAIN SMOKING RECORDS

Folk-punk wackos Harley Poe made an impact on *Rue Morgue* last year, winning best album of 2012 for *Satan, Sex and No Regrets*. Now, the Indiana monster kids return once more with *Man of God*, a 10-inch vinyl EP that glows in the trickin' dark! Already, this is a collector's item, and damn, the music is pretty fine too. The title track is somewhat of a departure from singer/songwriter Joe Whitetord's monster ditties, taking an angry stab at the religious right, while "Phantom in Your Mind" is a heartbreaking, harmonica-driven tune about a spectre following his corporeal love. The other two tracks, "Olivia" and "Corpse Grindin' Man," have been released elsewhere, with the former actually appearing on *Rue Morgue*'s *Hymns from the House of Horror* series. Given the limited amount of new music offered, *Man of God* isn't really an essential horror folk EP, but the bottom line is that Harley Poe continues to produce creative and twisted music that manages to combine the supernatural and real human emotion like few others. AVL ★★★½



THREE ONE SE7EN

HIP-HOP

Audio Plague

TORCHUR CHAMBER MUSIC

Horror and hip-hop have a pretty hit-and-miss relationship, sometimes you get a brilliant combination of the two cultures such as the Gravediggaz, who, thanks to the RZA, were both narratively interesting and musically brilliant, but other times you get *Leprechaun: Back 2 tha Hood*. Three One Se7en can't pull off the alchemy required to successfully bring the two genres together. The group's newest album, *Audio Plague*, is aptly titled given that it functions quite literally as a plague on your stereo. This is basically Insane Clown Posse minus the fun beats and loveable (and incredibly offensive) lyrical hyperbole. Three One Se7en isn't so much a band as a terrible amateur hobby, which is all fine and good for throwing around some rhymes in the basement with some pals, but these songs don't really deserve to be digitized and distributed. KH DOA



DEAD BY MIDNIGHT

AMBIENT

GRAVE TONE PRODUCTIONS

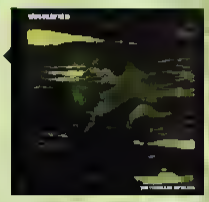
The people at Grave Tone Productions do something very generous: they create super-creepy industrial-inspired haunt music that can be used royalty-free by anyone who owns and operates a haunted attraction. Their latest outing, *Dead by Midnight*, includes atmospheric forest sounds and creaking panels, perfect for a sleepaway camp slasher scene, at other times their tracks go so heavy on the

TRIBULATION

METAL

The Formulas of Death

THE AJNA OFFENSIVE



On *The Formulas of Death*, Tribulation takes a stab at rewriting the extreme metal playbook and succeeds brilliantly, effortlessly combining precision riff-craft with an atmosphere as thick as the night is dark. It takes more than its fair share of inspiration from the black metal end of the spectrum, notably the mighty Dissection. Yet this tale of Tribulation speaks with a unique tone of its own, weaving tapestries of mood via the immense guitar work of Jonathan Hulten and Adam Zaars, a truly talented team whose flair for the grandiose is clearly on display within such tracks as "Spectres" and "Suspiria," the latter evoking a very measured musical comparison to Dario Argento's legendary film. Indeed, *The Formulas of Death* is very cinematic in its approach to blackened death metal, it's a thorough and thoughtful masterpiece that methodically lures the listener into a world where Tribulation reigns as extreme metal's conquering king. GP ★★★★★

industrial guitar licks that you'd swear you were listening to a *Resident Evil* movie soundtrack. These songs are composed with a variety of horror scenes in mind, so it doesn't exactly make for an album you'd throw on for a summer kegger. But if anyone does start wielding a hatchet or eating human flesh, you'll have the perfect soundtrack on hand with *Dead by Midnight*. KH ★★★½



SUICIDE COMMANDO

INDUSTRIAL

When Evil Speaks

METROPOLIS

For long-time listeners, it has felt like Johann Van Roy (a.k.a. Suicide Commando) became lost in the plot of his own private horror film. The Belgian electro-industrial artist has never had much time for subtlety (he once named a record after serial killer Dennis Rader's "Bind Torture Kill" *modus operandi*), but recent efforts have found him becoming more cartoonishly ghoulish, with him reciting a litany of evil acts over his distinctive stabby synths and pounding drums. Fortunately, his latest effort effectively rewinds the clock, with numbers such as 'Repent or Perish' and the exceptional "Monster" feeling more foreboding and mood driven, with fewer distinctly club-oriented beats to match. It's like the difference between a slasher flick and a psychological thriller, although we still get some songs in the vein of the former (namely the pounding "Cut Bleed Eviscerate"). It's the tracks that suggest violence rather than plainly describe it that really get under your skin. AK ★★★½



GOTHMINISTER

INDUSTRIAL

Utopia

AFM RECORDS

Although *Utopia* is ostensibly inspired by the Jekyll-and-Hyde dual life of Gothminister singer/composer Alexander Brem (who has a day job as a lawyer), you'd be hard pressed to find any evidence of it. Cleaving more closely to metal than at any point in the project's past, *Utopia* is uniformly dark and foreboding – unexpectedly so, considering the group represented Norway in the Eurovision Song Contest this year. Chugging guitar riffs are reinforced with grandiose symphonic touches and propelled by blastbeat drums, with Brem ever present as our narrator, ushering us through a variety of standard horror scenarios about nightmares, boogeymen and death. It's pretty boilerplate as far as these things go, shooting for territory somewhere between Rammstein and Rob Zombie, but largely lacking the Teutonic wit of the former and the campy fun of the latter. One gets the impression that Gothminister takes itself pretty seriously, but that's just not lively enough to justify *Utopia*'s inherent hokeyness. AK ★½



CORN ON MACABRE

METAL

Discographic Violence

MAGIC BULLET RECORDS

Lost amongst the, er, rows of more mainstream releases on Record Store Day was this crucial slab of creepy progressive grindcore – Corn on Macabre's entire discography on one randomly split-coloured LP. The band's life was obviously short, stretching from 2001 to 2003 with only a couple of 7-inches to their super-cool name, but it's remembered for producing a violent and dark brand of hardcore that was probably ahead of its time. These boys were horror fans right down to the cob, referencing H.G. Wells, Ray Bradbury and Boris Karloff in songs with a political bent, while mixing in more playful lyrics about *Friday the 13th* and *They Live*. The package design of this LP is beautiful, punctuated by an exceptional *Children of the Corn*-influenced record sticker, making this a short (all thirteen tracks are over in less than thirteen minutes), sweet and bloody good addition for your shelves. AVL ★★★½



Even if you're not a soundtrack geek, there are a few names that even casual horror fans should know: in the US, John Carpenter's synth scores are nearly as popular as the films he directed, while overseas, the horror soundtrack belongs to Italian prog rockers Goblin, the band's name practically synonymous with European splatter and giallo.

But unlike Carpenter, who obviously wrote music with a specific movie, mood and feel in mind, Goblin's career sort of worked in reverse, their jazzy King Crimson meets Emerson, Lake & Palmer instrumentation wasn't exactly born with the intention of evoking scares. It was in 1975, when they were still called Cherry Five, that Dario Argento offered the group the chance to score *Deep Red*. The soundtrack was a huge hit, and shortly thereafter keyboardist Maurizio Guarini joined the band to record what would become one of the most iconic scores in horror history: *Suspiria* (1977).

"*Suspiria* was basically composed before the movie was shot, and in some way Dario took some inspiration from the music while shooting," recalls Guarini, who now resides in Toronto.

Guarini went on to a career in software and video game development, but never left music, even reforming with former Goblin bandmates to release a new album in 2005, and then reuniting with original Goblin founder Claudio Simonetti for a world tour under the moniker New Goblin. This year, Guarini released his first-ever solo album, *Creatures from a Drawer*, a collection of tracks recorded over the years that have been filed away until now. The album is anything but uniform, ranging from New Age-y to jazzy, to even dance numbers, exploring all kinds of strange worlds and soundscapes.

Horror fans will be looking for Goblin comparisons and there are a few to be found, particularly on the spacey "Gentle Robbery," the menacing "Black Dog" and the proggy "Lost My Camera." That said, on its own, *Creatures* doesn't exactly sound like a horror album. But in a way that shouldn't be surprising. Had the members of Goblin never met Argento, it's likely the group would have continued to exist without ever being associated with the genre. The reality is, any one of the tracks on *Creatures* could be applied to film, it's up to the listener to imagine what their visual impact might be. Guarini waxes eloquently on this point.



"Music by itself cannot be horror; the horror is inside ourselves while we listen. Anything can be scary. A music box playing a lullaby can be very scary – see *Suspiria* for example. Would you consider *Suspiria*'s main theme scary if you didn't associate it with the movie? Anything can be horror. Silence can be horror. I could have arranged the album using more elements identified as 'horror,' like a dark choir, but I didn't want to go too far from the initial nature of my compositions. It's the listener's soundtrack. We need to explore, experiment and risk, we can't keep using stereotypes."

If you're interested in exploring for yourself, *Creatures from a Drawer* can be yours at backtothefudda.com/shop.

AARON VON LUPTON

FOR THEIR LATEST ALBUM, **THE BUILDERS AND THE BUTCHERS** TAKE A CUE FROM CORMAC McCARTHY AND MINE THE DARKEST CORNERS OF AMERICAN MYTHOLOGY

HELL out WEST

BY SAM COSTELLO



THE AMERICAN WEST HAS LONG CARRIED A MYTHIC QUALITY, EXISTING AS MUCH AS AN IDEA AS A LANDSCAPE. BECKONING PEOPLE EVER ONWARD IN SEARCH OF ADVENTURE, REINVENTION AND RICHES.

Some pioneers found their fortunes, but just as many – probably more – met with heartache, failure, even death. Despite the frontier's darkness, or perhaps because of it, Ryan Sollee, the lyricist, singer and guitarist for The Builders and The Butchers, has long heard the West's siren song.

"I really love the West because it was one of the last places on Earth where there was a feeling of undiscovered hope, but usually this turned into disappointment," he says. "I think it's interesting that so many of our recent relatives were willing to cast everything off and go out into the unknown void of the West."

The West has been the setting for many of the songs on the group's three studio albums, beginning in 2007. But on the Portland, Oregon, band's newest outing, *Western Medicine*, it's the sole focus. Sollee says that reviewers have pegged his main influence as novelist Cormac McCarthy, though he actually only read the author for the first time in preparation for the new album. Now, after the singer steeped himself in the fear and loathing of McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, *The Road* and *No Country for Old Men*, the author's shadow stretches right across *Western Medicine*, through songs such as "Blood Runs Cold," "Desert Is on Fire" and "Hell Fire Mountain."



While its themes and lyrics may be dark as midnight, the band's music is an uptempo, even joyous, roots/Americana blend descended from centuries-old murder ballads, call-and-response field songs, and blues and gospel.

"The majority of really good folk, blues and gospel songs are really dark," Sollee says. "Many of the songs, just like children's stories, have been edited and softened over time, but if there is something I'd like to be remembered for, it's being a part of the tradition of storytellers that talked about the darkness we all have inside."

Since their earliest days as street performers, the group – which also comprises Justin Baier, Willy Kunkle, Ray Rude and Harvey Tumbleson – has played traditional instruments, including acoustic guitar, mandolin and banjo. Previous albums were recorded in a style that's rare these days: The Builders and Butchers played together in the studio, laying down the songs live, with little overdubbing (most modern albums are mixed together from individually recorded instrumental and vocal tracks). *Western Medicine*, however, breaks with these traditions to include electric guitar, it was also recorded in the more conventional manner.

"Because of the largeness of the songs, we knew we'd be mixing a lot and didn't want to sacrifice any of the sounds, so we did each of the instruments piece by piece," explains Sollee.

The recording technique may be different, but *Western Medicine* is just as infectious as the group's previous albums, with songs that are more textured and dramatic, almost epic. And that epic feel certainly comes through in the band's album art, by Portland artist Lukas Ketner, which features a surreal apocalyptic landscape with a lava-spewing mountain mine, flaming oilfields, crumbling railway tracks, a graveyard and various mutants and monsters.

Despite creating roots/Americana music these days, Sollee originally played in a punk band when he moved to Portland from Alaska, which may explain that anarchic streak. But even then he wasn't listening to heavy music. "[A friend] introduced me to a bunch of old pre-1950s blues and gospel field recordings ... I totally fell in love with it and started writing songs."

Whether inspired by the West, roots music or the old, weird stories that resonate throughout that culture, Sollee is drawn to all things macabre, morbid and monstrous – and sees it as the way to capture listeners.

"An amazing dark painting or drawing affects me much more than something beautiful," he says. "What's important to me is that an audience is engaged. For me, the best way to engage folks is with dark story songs."

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PLAY DEAD

NOW PLAYING > RESIDENT EVIL: REVELATIONS, MANSION RUN, HEARSE DRIVER 3D



RESIDENT EVIL: REVELATIONS

Xbox 360, PS3, Wii U, PC
Capcom



Last year was a big one for the *Resident Evil* franchise. Not only did it see the theatrical release of *Resident Evil: Retribution*, but gamers were also inundated with three different titles to choose from: *RE6*, *RE: Operation Raccoon City* and *RE: Revelations*. Though it had originally been released solely for the Nintendo 3DS, *Revelations* fared so much better than its multi-platform counterparts that the folks at Capcom decided to spice it up a bit and port it out to the home console market.

Set mainly on the high seas, the action takes place between *RE4* and *RE5*. It's your mission to explore a creepy old cruise ship, the SS Queen Zenobia, as you track Il Veltro, a terrorist organization threatening to release a new strain of the T-Virus on the world.

The franchise returns to its horror-survival roots, with gameplay focussing less on manic monster battles and more on solving puzzles and investigating your surroundings. Limited ammunition means that you can't treat this game like a shooting gallery or else you're going to find yourself in deep trouble, with your head detached from your shoulders.

That said, there *are* some scary new creatures in this outing, including the Wall Blister, a huge barnacle-looking thing that sprouts multiple claws to shred you into gooey chunks. But where this game really succeeds is with its eerie soundscapes and foreboding environments. It's hard not to feel completely terrified as you're exploring the dark, cramped crew quarters of the vessel or the devastated city of Terragrigia while hearing the ominous moans of some abhorrent creature lurking up ahead. And that's a good thing because the voice acting and dialogue are completely atrocious. Frankly, I'd much rather be scared by the sounds of the creaking ship than listen to one of the characters repeatedly and irritatingly go on about her "sweet ass."

Overall, however, Capcom has done a wonderful job of updating this handheld title to the console format, and fans of the franchise will be thrilled by the return to true terror. Whoever said "survival horror video games are dead" obviously hasn't played this one.

ANDREW LEE

HEADSHOTS: EERIE SOUNDSCAPE, HAUNTING ENVIRONMENTS, STRONG STORYLINE
MISFIRES: ATROCIOUS VOICE ACTING, A BIT REPETITIVE, TOO MANY FLASHBACKS

MANSION RUN

Underground Pixel
iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad

If you can overlook this game's nonsensical premise that a skeleton would be afraid of ghosts, *Mansion Run* is a frightfully fun, albeit quick, side-scrolling game for your iDevice. Inspired by the 2-D retro console games of the late '80s, this "endless runner" has you, a finely dressed skeleton named Bones Wellington, fleeing from ghosts while jumping between four floors of a haunted mansion, all while avoiding possessed furniture and collecting bones.

Every hundred bones you rack up gains you a random power up (invincibility, slow motion or ghost repellant) that you can use when times get tough. (Spoiler: the ghosts never actually catch you, but you do get hurt when you run into the furniture.)

The game is set to a nostalgic chiptune soundtrack that fits perfectly with its 16-bit graphics, and at 99 cents it's got the right price point. Unfortunately, though certainly fun while it lasts, *Mansion Run*'s spooky novelty fades fairly quickly. What you see in the first few minutes is what you get. No surprises here.

JESSA SOBCZUK

HEADSHOTS: CHALLENGING GAMEPLAY
MISFIRES: FURNITURE MORE DANGEROUS THAN GHOSTS

HEARSE DRIVER 3D

Athanasius Rogkas
iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad

If driving a hearse is anything like *Hearse Driver 3D*, it's hard work indeed, especially when your corpse is constantly trying to escape out the back.

The objective here seems fairly simple: get the body to the graveyard before time runs out, and drive carefully, as the corpse gets tossed loose with even the slightest bump or turn.

In arcade mode, you must race to the boneyard while avoiding traffic and obstacles, which proves to be pretty damned challenging. In free mode it's even easier to lose the corpse, so easy, in fact, that you may begin to suspect (as I did) that he's actually trying to escape.

The game boasts a huge map, though you may not get the chance to see much of it before your dead cargo goes flying. If you manage to collect some coins during your drives, you can upgrade your coffin (leopard print, anyone?), your ride or even your corpse (have the honour of bringing a pumpkinhead to his final resting place).

Frustrating? Extremely. Fun? Not exactly, but still somehow surprisingly addictive.

JESSA SOBCZUK

HEADSHOTS: PLAYFUL RAGDOLL PHYSICS
MISFIRES: EXPENSIVE UPGRADES

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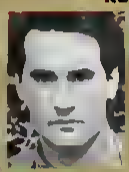
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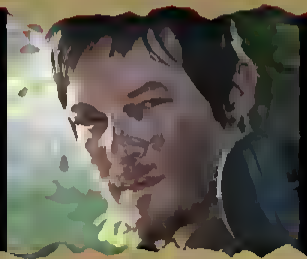
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CLASSIC CUT

THE PAN BOOK OF HORROR STORIES SERIES

HERBERT VAN THAL ☠ UK – 1959 TO 1989

Few subjects better suit the short story format than horror, where a sense of the macabre is built quickly, then capped with a grisly denouement, often coming unexpectedly and frequently with a twist. The pulp-ish appeal of cheap paperbacks featuring lurid cover art, which British publisher Pan had been successfully utilizing since its inception in 1944, lent itself perfectly to tales of terror. Knowing this, the company's sales director at the time, Ralph Vernon-Hunt, approached Pan's top editor, Clarence Paget, with a pitch for a collection of horror stories, asking whether Paget knew anyone who could bring it together. He did. Enter Herbert Van Thal, an old friend of Paget, who enthusiastically embraced the idea and set about working on the first volume of what would become the longest running collection of horror anthologies in publishing history.



Initially Van Thal gleaned his material from previous collections such as the *Not at Night* series, which had been popular from the mid-1920s through to the 1930s. (*Not at Night* had found its inspiration in stories first published in American magazine *Weird Tales*.) As a result, the stories in the early editions of the *Pan Book of Horror Stories* series were nearly all reprints. Such archaic and innocent-sounding gems as George Fielding Eliot's tale of oriental terror "The Copper Bowl" and Peter Fleming's account of lycanthropy in England's West Country ("The Kill") were stories which, having first appeared in 1928 and 1936 respectively, still retained their ability to induce disquiet in the unwary reader. Even in the anthology's early years, however, there was a peppering of contemporary titles that would go on to become genre classics. Muriel Spark's "The Portobello Road" (concerning the ghost of a girl called Needle, whose body is found in a haystack and who lingers on in order to haunt her killer), which had appeared a year earlier in her own collection *The Go-Away Bird*, and Joan Aiken's "Jugged Hare" (in which a hunting-obsessed husband extracts unorthodox though fitting revenge on his unfaithful wife) were both included in the debut *Pan Book of Horror Stories* in 1959, reminding readers that terror could be found in the most mundane of situations and places.



The tone of the books – which shared a sense of twisted depravity with the compilation fright films being produced by British studios such as Amicus and Tyburn around the same period – soon caught the attention of a public eager for quality horror fiction. As the series progressed, Van Thal began to include more work from fresh and emerging writers. Stories by authors such as Dulcie Gray – an established British actress who became a regular contributor after writing volume seven's "The Fur Brooch" (an unpleasant warning against spurning unwanted matrimonial advances) – took a more straightforward, visceral approach to horror, and were soon making up the sole content of the books.

Over time, both the stories and covers continued to move away from the subtle and suggestive to focus increasingly on the unpleasant and outright sadistic. Where the first *Pan Book of Horror Stories* had featured a drawing of a black cat on the front (pictured, top), which implied more than it showed, later volumes displayed doctored photos of rotting corpses, severed hands and human faces with flayed and burning skin. It was these changes in direction that were partly responsible for the decline in the popularity of the series in the 1980s – even if they were simply an attempt to capitalize on changing tastes.

Not surprisingly, during its decades-long run, the *Pan Book of Horror Stories* series spawned numerous imitations. The most famous of these were rival publisher Fontana's own collection of horror books that ran to an impressive fifteen editions. Familiarity, as they say, breeds contempt and, despite Pan's attempts to inject new life into the series by introducing contributors such as Stephen King, the now-legendary horror anthologies passed their heyday. By the time Paget took over the editorship following the death of Van Thal in 1983, the rot had set in, with the last book (volume 30) released in 1989.

This may not be the end of the story, however. The influence of the series can be seen by such revered purveyors of menace as Clive Barker and Philip Pullman crediting the books for shaping their interest in the genre, whilst original copies of the paperbacks are now highly collectible. Perhaps the ultimate accolade came with the reissue in 2010 of the first *Pan Book of Horror Stories*, complete with original cover art, proving that the series is not dead but just taking a well-earned rest.

CLEAVER PATTERSON



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